THE REAL CHRISTIAN

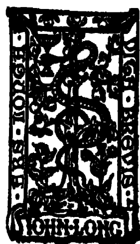
THE REAL CHRISTIAN



By

Lucas Cleeve

Author of
"Plato's Handmaiden," "Yolande, the Parisienne,"
"Lazarus," etc.



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CHAPTER I.

"I FEAR everything for him . . . because he is so good."

The speech was more passionate than the calm, almost reticent expression of the widow's face seemed to warrant. As if suddenly the past had held a mirror to her face, with the reflection of herself preserved in it for twenty years, she seemed to see herself kneeling with her child clasped in her arms, agonized at the loneliness, terrified beneath a burden she hardly felt equal to bear: the responsibility of a living soul. All the solitude of sojourning on this earth came to her and distressed her with an agitation that rendered her almost

scared and terrified to dismay, at the thought of being all that was left to guide a man's soul; yet how would he have guided it, who had gone swiftly to his account without regaining consciousness, from a fall which had been caused by? . . . Ah! she knew too well, alas, by what! How often she had dreaded this, remonstrated with him for driving himself home in the evening, had begged him not to do so, sat with strained ear till she heard the wheels of his cart rumbling in the distance. She remembered, too, what the habit of years would not permit her to forget, the horror with which she would sit and listen for one moment before she went to meet him, and how she would fight with herself in order to overcome her repugnance, if . . . and he was rarely sober. She was glad to think now that she had always been to meet him, always guided his unsteady steps. And then he had died—had driven straight into a tramcar, his cart had been overturned, and he had died instantaneously; and the horror of his death had towered above the relief of it, and left her

sad. Womanlike she had remembered him as he was when he had first told her that he cared for her, and when she had hoped to reform him. But that was more than twenty years ago—more than twenty years ago. Like a very Hannah she had held her child in her arms the night they brought her husband home dead, and offered him to the God she believed in so firmly. What could she do with the soul of a man, poor frail creature, if God did not help her? . . . What might not be in the boy's blood? . . . Could she live through the sequel to the short, bitter story of her life? . . .

Women thought her hard when she said: "Better that he should die—better that he should die." She deserved to lose her child, people said. Later on they shrugged their shoulders and laughed and prognosticated evil from her upbringing.

"Wait till he's grown up!" they said; and her relations told her stories of sons who had grown sickened of religion, of clergymen's sons who had gone to the bad, grown blasphemous with surfeit of doctrine,

and she trembled but went her way. Never a drop of wine came to their table; she taught the child to hate the thing like poison. But when the years went by and she would not let him eat meat, the relations began to interfere.

"You can't expect to make a second John the Baptist of him," they said. A mischievous cousin had sent her a basket of locusts. When they spoke like that she trembled, trembled like a crystal vase on an unsteady pedestal, then righted herself and smiled.

"We shall see," she would say; but she trembled often. Was God listening to her prayers, or would a terrible crash come at the end of it all? . . . "An only son!" people said, and shrugged their shoulders.

"Cracked on the subject of education," whispered the neighbourhood, when the still slim, graceful figure in black was seen abroad, holding the child by the hand. And now, after twenty years, she still trembled. It seemed as if it could not last—this perfect thing God had given her. So do we limit the gifts of God, and seek in every

rose the caterpillar 'neath the fragrance. A week's silence when he was away from her, and she would fear that the gaunt ghosts of evil had clasped him to them. There were other ghosts than the one that stalks the vineyards, and not all gaunt ones. There was woman, that subtle creation for man's weal or woe; money—that gilded ghost that dogs the steps of men; a thousand fiends there were arraigned against this woman who lived and prayed and fought for the soul of her son,—her only son. The great army of scoffers, how she dreaded them! And worse, the Rationalists, who tried to prove by argument what they destroyed by proof, namely, the ineffable sacrament of faith, which ceases to exist if the substance of it is proved. But she was sensible, too, beyond what anyone had hoped. She had sent him to a public school, and he had been taught to row and to ride, to swim and to fight; and she remembered well when the first yielding to public opinion had become necessary.

"They laugh at me dreadfully for

not eating meat, and Dr Garthorne says I sha'n't have any muscle if I don't." She remembered now how the letter had disturbed her, more than it need, a great deal. It was just Life beginning to threaten her, a feeble woman, for trying to defy it. Her first instinct had been to write a severe letter asking him why he cared if the boys laughed. The want of strength in him irritated her; but then she remembered that he was only, after all, a tiny wisp of a boy.

"You must do as you like," she wrote; "you know what my wishes are. I should have thought my Harold was brave enough not to care whether people laughed at him or not." Then she felt sorry she had written like that, and wrote again—

"Of course, darling, if you think it is better to do as the other boys do I don't want to stop you. Of course, if you feel it is better for you while you are working hard, don't hesitate to take what you like."

Then came a letter from Harold. "It's all right; there's only one chap bothers me about it, and nobody cares a bit what he

says. I'm all right!" Mrs Trafford's heart leaped. She read the love for her, the determination of the boy, between the lines. She did not know that he had opened the Bible at the lines she had so often perused with him—

"And God said: Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree in the which is the fruit of a tree *yielding seed, to you it shall be for meat.*" It seemed clear enough to him that his mother was right. God had never intended man to eat anything but fruit and vegetables. It could not be that man had the right to take away the life of any of God's creatures.

And now after twenty years she still felt the presence of the ghost of dread. Years succeeded years, and her boy had become all she had hoped and prayed for. But he was only twenty; between now and forty what temptations might not assail him? . . .

"It cannot last, it cannot be so for ever," she said to herself. And now came the question of a profession. He was just leav-

ing Oxford. She had hoped he would go into the Church. His own wish had been to enter the army. She had not dissuaded him, but he had felt that she did not wish it, and had relinquished the idea without letting her know his disappointment; and now a distant relative who had influence at the Bar became interested in him and suggested his being a barrister; and this was decided upon after many long talks.

The Traffords were not rich, but comfortably off—enough to possess all the neatnesses of life. They had lived all these years in a pretty little cottage at Dorking. Country life, that was what had been one of the primary theories in Mrs Trafford's scheme of upbringing. Birds and flowers, dogs and horses and a garden. An invitation to the lovely things of life to come and bide with them. But now they would have to live in London; and the little cottage was let, and the mother and son took up their residence in a pretty little flat, in a centre that was neither fashionable nor the reverse. At first the mud-perspiring

streets and dingy walls stifled them both; but presently the witchery of London threw its spell upon him, and he entered into the great arena of humanity almost with enthusiasm. Mrs Trafford had brought to the little town-house all the grace and comfort, the pretty surroundment her cottage had possessed, and soon it had become the haven of many pleasant friends. Yet even here the ghost accompanied them. She had all a country woman's dread of great cities. Daily she realised more and more that she could not keep sin away should it knock at their doors. "The glass case," Harold would laughingly call their home, "in which you would like to lock me up," he would say to her. "You dear thing, what do you think is going to happen to me?" . . . And as the years rolled by the *fear* of evil grew less strong, and there was only the fear lest he should fall in love with one unworthy. But as yet women were to him only a great wonder,—beautiful angels that flit 'twixt heaven and earth, free to come and go,

and sing, and laugh, and in favour with God and men. And then at last one ghost came and stood before her, and looked at her in the eyes, and made her tremble all over. The little house had been given over to the upheaval of a spring cleaning, and the important matter of dusting and protecting his books was her own special care. Here and there she opened one, and even stopped to read a page or two, for she was more than an ordinarily well-educated, cultivated woman; and presently she came upon a little pile of apparently new books, pushed a little way to the back of the case as if to shelter them, if not to hide them. What were they, she wondered? Then as her eyes scanned the titles, the eyelids quivered a little as if a sudden light had struck upon them.

Books on theosophy, translations of Nitsche, Schopenhauer, Kant. How had they come into his possession? . . . How was it that he had never mentioned them to her? . . . Perhaps some friend had lent them to him, but no.

As she replaced them, a couple of sheets of notepaper fluttered to the ground, closely written upon in his handwriting,—notes evidently of what he was studying. It was the first faint echo of the world's thunderclap that was coming to her. Had she not been listening for it all these years? . . .

"Oh the wicked, wicked men who write these books! God forgive them!" she whispered as she put them all hastily back, as if they stung her fingers to hold. And then slowly a tear rose to her eyes. Who was she, to think she could keep the soul of her son unspotted? . . .

For one instant there floated through her heart hard thoughts of him. Why had he hidden this from her? Could it be that doubt had come to him? . . . That he was gradually going over to those ranks of pulseless human cases,—those timeless, stringless instruments whose sacred chords are broken, and who can no longer sing the music of holy praise or cry out in glad enthusiasm of gratitude? . . .

Fool, fool that she had been to think that she could plant and water a seed within him that would never die! All the impotence of humanity seemed to have fallen upon her frail shoulders. She even could not bear to stay in his room,—the bright fresh room that was like a maiden's, with the window thrown open and the sun streaming in, as if attracted by the fellowship of gold in the jonquils on the table. Outside, trees waved to the April wind, and birds sang and all nature cried out "God," everywhere, light and love, except in the little dark corner of the bookshelf, where, huddled together, stood the nauseous volumes looking to her like missiles from hell. She would have taken them and torn the pages out one by one and crushed them, scattered them to the wind—the wind that blew so cleanly across the square and lifted the ash-gold tendrils of her hair from off her forehead, and tugged softly at the tiny bits of old lace which played at being a cap; yet what good would that do? . . . There were others, thousands of them, to be bought, and the evil of them

was accomplished. As she stood there with folded hands, on which the rings sparkled in the morning sunlight, she realised that the thing that had come to her was not what she had dreaded most. Women, wine, money, frivolity, disgrace,—all these had been the garbs her ghosts had worn; yet as she stood there in the morning's sun and realised all her work undone, the ghost whose name was "Unbelief" seemed to her the least familiar. It was as if Harold had brought to his home a new friend whose face she distrusted and disliked; and all day she wondered how this strange, foul thing had entered her sweet-smelling nest. She longed, yet dreaded, for his return, and wondered how she would tell him what she had seen, or if she would speak of it at all to him. She felt she must die if she could not learn what he felt, what had led him to seeking out these books; yet if he told her that he no longer believed it would break her heart. And so she fidgeted through the day, wondering, dreading, often shedding tears, and too

agitated to pray that this thing should not come to pass, and then she heard the latchkey turn in the door and the cheery voice begin to whistle. He was hanging up his hat and coat. She nearly always opened the door and said "Harold," but to-day she felt numbed and starved. Something had grown up between them. Her lips trembled as he kissed her, and he thought she was not well, but she avoided his questioning. With his warm, sunny presence in the room, it seemed as if her ghost had vanished. "I've asked a chap to dinner, mother; an awfully nice chap. I think you'll like him; he's a parson. I met him at the Listers' last year, and to-day I ran against him in the street. He has got a parish somewhere in London." The ghost was quite vanishing now. Suddenly it seemed to her as if she owed Harold an apology. She rose, and putting her two hands on his shoulders, looked up into his face.

"Do you know that your foolish old mother has been through the most dreadful day?" . . .

"Why, what has happened? Why didn't you send for me?"

"I hardly like to tell you." Then, knowing that like most men he hated mystery or suspense, she went on rapidly.

"I found some books in your room; books of that dreadful Nitsche and others, and I set about, like the foolish old woman I am, imagining that you were losing your faith."

Was it fancy, or the glow from the pink lamp shade, or did a faint colour overspread his face?

"That's a judgment upon you for clearing my room." He laughed a little awkwardly, and she let her arms fall, feeling not quite satisfied.

She felt it on her lips to say—"Why did you not tell me about them?" . . . Then she remembered that he was five-and-twenty; and in the dim light of the little drawing-room there rose to her fancy the image of another mother striving to read the thoughts of her son, and it seemed to her as if she could hear the words—"Woman, what have I to do with

thee?" . . . And without knowing it, her thoughts were agonized prayers to the mother of sorrows.

"I think that kind of reading does so much harm," she went on, taking up her knitting and sitting down near the lamp. "What more can people want than the Sermon on the Mount?"

"If——" he began, then stopped. It seemed blasphemy to disturb the peaceful faith of his mother.

"The Sermon on the Mount is not practicable in the present day," he said presently. Then, as she looked up inquiringly, he went on with a laugh. "There'd be no need for barristers, for instance, and your son would be penniless, if men carried out the fortieth verse of the fifth chapter of St. Matthew—I think it is the fortieth verse: 'If any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.'" He smiled at his mother, but she was silent. She had not the habit of controversy. The Bible had sufficed her, and she had hoped it would suffice her son.

"There's quite enough in the Bible for

man's need," she replied, with a little asperity; "no good ever came of discussing the Bible."

"Granted, if a man can accept it, all the better for him; but in these days a man requires a religion that can be applied to his daily life. That is just what the Romans reproach us with, that we take the Bible and turn and twist it as we like."

"Yet in the Roman Church you would not be allowed to argue or dispute. You would have to believe blindly what the Church of Rome taught you. Why then not believe the Gospel blindly?"

"I don't say that I don't, mother; only you must not mind my wanting to hear what the other side has to say."

And Mrs Trafford was obliged to be satisfied with this, and felt it was wiser to say no more.

CHAPTER II.

"WHEN is John the Baptist coming?" The voice was kindly and very well bred, but held in it a tinge of gentle irony that was tempered by the benignity of a long and impressive beard. It was Lady Fellcroft's father who asked the question. It was not often that his widowed daughter showed enthusiasm in these days, but she had come back from a quiet dinner-party so evidently impressed by a new personality in the world's pageant that her father had felt a vague interest aroused in him.

"A possible if not a probable 'vert, I suppose."

It had always been tacitly understood that Mary was not to be offended with her father's mildly humorous allusions to her having joined the Church of Rome,

which she had done shortly after her marriage.

After all, he had taken it so well. There had been no opposition, no outcry and no pleading, although he had felt it more keenly than she would have believed. It would be hard, indeed, if he could not use it as a little joke to enliven dull hours. Nevertheless it had seemed to him as if part of his daughter had departed from him, and from sheer loneliness of spirit he had married again a young and very charming wife. While her husband was alive Mary Fellcroft had been glad that he had some one to comfort him; but when she recrossed the threshold of his old home she could not help realising how happy they two might have been together.

It had been her father's wish that she should return to her old home, and for a time it seemed the only thing to do. She was weary of travelling, of being dependent for sympathy and exchange of thought on strangers at hotels. The loneliness of her life weighed upon her

after the few brief years of happy life with her husband. Later on, perhaps, she would buy a house, surround her loneliness with all the pretty baubles and the easily-bought friends who help us to cheat ourselves into the thought that we are happy; but just now it seemed to her as if to be mistress of a house would emphasize her loneliness. Her father had given her up a suite of apartments in his large house, and so they lived—the two women who loved the same man and disliked each other. Mrs Lister would smile to herself when she met the long-robed figure of Mary's priest on the stairs. She was not a particularly religious woman, and she had all an Anglican woman's dislike of the mysterious surroundments and reservations of the Roman Church,—surroundments which to a great extent exist only in the minds of the Anglicans; for in honest Catholics there is no mystery, only perhaps, too much enforced conviction to seem sincere. All her English independence of character revolted against the government of the Roman Church, and she

still had to a vast degree the old Puritan abhorrence of the tyranny of Rome. It is strange how the remembrance of the massacre of the Protestants by Mary has survived the chronicle of the massacre of the Romans by Queen Elizabeth. One thing Mary Fellcroft had made perfectly clear when she returned to her father's house—she would stand being chaffed by her father, but her step-mother was never to broach the subject of the difference of their creeds. On the subject of religion she maintained, with regard to her step-mother, a reserved aloofness which had in it something of pity.

It was piteous to hear the babbling ignorance of those who were outside the "only true Church." It behoved her to pray for them, to be very tolerant, very patient, but it was best to prevent friction by establishing a barrier of reserve. Mary Fellcroft had passed through all the stages of grief peculiar to widows. There had been the fierce revolt, the passionate regret, the gnawing longing for the husband, the realisation of the irreplaceable. The

daisy dashed to the ground by the violence of the storm, lying lifeless against the ground, crushed, helpless, without vitality; then the gradual recoil of the heart upon itself, a slow numbness, miscalled submission, an alternate appeal to the pity of others and a refusal of it. There had been a long period when she had refused to go out anywhere, or receive any but the most intimate friend; and then gradually, from sheer wealth of sunshine, the daisy had begun to lift its head a little, and gradually, gradually stood upright again, only it no longer smiled to the sunshine. Two years had elapsed, and occasionally she went out to quiet dinners. There had been a time when she had hinted at entering a convent, and her step-mother had smiled; but those days were over, and at one of those dinners she had met Harold Trafford, and wondered that a thing so wonderful should exist upon earth. "Quite, quite a Saint Augustine," she said to herself.

She had learned a great deal about him from himself, as many people did who

dined at the same table. It always began with the question of diet. It was perhaps the part of his life he disliked most, this revelation of himself through his habits. He felt that he looked like a prig, like a *poseur*. She had been too well brought up to embark on personalities with a stranger, but he had seen her look of wonder as one dish after the other was refused or remained untouched.

"You are, I see, one of those wonderful people who don't dine," she said, and he thought her voice was one of the pleasantest he had ever heard. Gradually he had told her of his upbringing, and how, now that he was grown up, the idea of eating a thing that had lived was revolting to him. His conversation in a London drawing-room seemed to carry her away to distant countries and times. She felt as if she were reading a chapter of the Old Testament.

"What a splendid Catholic he would make!" was the thought uppermost in her mind, mingled with regret that she had no son to bring up like this man;

and she had told her father, who had christened him John the Baptist, while wondering if there was more than admiration in her thoughts, and hoping so.

"She will marry again," he said to his young wife, and his young wife devoutly hoped she would. There was something very depressing in the presence of this tall, quiet woman, a year older than herself, and whose faith seemed arraigned against the members of the household like spiked bars; for there's nothing so aggressive as a pervert, or so stubbornly passive in patient tolerance.

And now he felt sure that John the Baptist was the man who would solve the problem; for it was a difficult problem, this presence of the widowed daughter in the same house as the cheery young wife. When Harold called he could not do enough to bid him welcome; he must dine with them, go to the opera with them. Mr Lister would have preferred a play, but he was afraid of suggesting anything so frivolous to John the Baptist.

Gradually it became natural that John

the Baptist should be introduced straight to Lady Fellcroft's sitting-room, and remain there for a couple of hours.

Mrs Lister smiled to herself, and was growing hopeful. She even called on John the Baptist's mother now and then. Mrs Trafford dined with them. Mrs Trafford was not sure whether to be glad or sorry at her son's infatuation. There was nothing undesirable in Lady Fellcroft as a daughter-in-law. She had good looks, a good position, money. In some ways it was a better marriage than she could have hoped for. What did it matter her being two years older? . . . Only to Mrs Trafford, the daughter of a low-church clergyman, there clung that strange, half-superstitious dread of Mary's faith, which is like the fear of our childhood at unknown, undefinable horrors. He was quite the sort of man to go over to his wife's faith. The ghost rose up in fresh travesty, and dogged the mother's footsteps again. What if her son's soul should escape her along the very path she had fashioned for him—the path of

religion? She asked herself the question which ghost she would choose—unbelief or religion—and could not answer herself sincerely. Her son a devout Roman or a scoffer—which was best? . . . To her it seemed that scoffing and unbelief did not exist except in words. From these there would be the ultimate return to faith. Cynicism, scepticism, wear themselves out, but Rome grips. And wondering that she did so, she felt that while swayed by unbelief, she—the woman, the mother—had influence that would tell; clasped by Rome, he would defy her.

In her fancy she had seen him in love with some graceful, clinging girl of nineteen, who would worship him as she, his mother, wished him to be worshipped. The widow of Sir Joseph Fellcroft had nothing clinging in her. She would command his mind; mould him. He would bend to her, not she to him. No; as the days went by, Mrs Trafford was not happy in her mind at the probable possibility of her son's marriage with Mary Fellcroft. She had no snobbery in her

composition; all she demanded was her son's happiness.

But her thoughts had outrun those of Harold. It had not struck him that people would at once write him down as an admirer of the widow's. Young as she was, she yet seemed to him old enough to be a pal. He was immensely attracted by her, principally because his acquaintance with women was small,—with intellectual women nil,—and her short, happy married life had brought man's mind within closer range of her understanding. . . . She was not at all a flirt, and told herself that it was only the man's mind that interested her. She was glad to introduce him to her familiar priest. It was good to sit by and watch these two, to hear them talk. It would come—she knew, she felt it—the moment when, from sheer bewilderment, he accepted the government of his thoughts and belief by the Infallible Church.

"I felt just like you; I have been through it all, you see; I know how restless I felt. I threshed out and ex-

hausted all the opposite arguments. I said to myself just what you say—How can the Church prove its right to dictate to the whole world? . . . And then I remember such a dear woman, a Catholic, a cousin of my husband, answered me—'And how can you prove that you have a right to interpret Christ's words for yourself in your own way? . . . There would be no organisation at all, no sacraments. After all, if commandments were given by Christ, it is the ceremonial of the Church of Rome that enforces them.'" She spoke as Catholics do, with a triumphant certainty that no stronger argument can be found by the opposite party; and Harold was silent, not because she convinced him, but because he felt too ignorant of all creeds to be able to discuss them. He generally carried away from his visits with her some little book on the question of Rome, and if he did not always agree with her, he never told her so. The importance of deciding on a definite form of faith did not seem to him of primary importance. The difficulty

was to believe at all, or, if not to believe, to be in earnest about one's beliefs.

"Of course, one can't help saying to oneself that if there is anything in religion at all there must be a great deal, and that one is a fool if one does not cast aside every other consideration except that of saving one's soul."

"There are no 'ifs' in religion," she said, a little sententiously; "not when one has once grasped hold of the true faith. Oh! you do not know what a rest it is merely to accept."

Harold was not at all quite sure that this was the right thing to do. It is difficult to an Englishman to accept anything blindly.

"How I wish you could see Rome!" she said one day. "Why, the very stones seem to cry out 'Infallibility, eternity'!" . . .

Harold had never travelled, and the idea pleased him.

"If you go to Rome you must let me give you a letter to Father Carlini. He is a cousin of my poor husband's, and was

so good to us in Rome." Her voice grew a little pathetic as the remembrance of the most romantic episode in her married life came back to her. There was a moment's silence, during which the roar of distant traffic seemed to reassert itself.

"What are you going to do this autumn?" She almost started at his question. She had been thinking how delightful it would be to show him Italy.

"Oh! I have made no plans. My father wants me to go with him to St Moritz." Presently she added: "I may end up in Italy in the hills somewhere, but I never make plans now."

For the first time it struck him that her heart ached. A sudden pity for the childless woman rose in his mind. He knew how he had been able to fill the void in his mother's heart, and this woman had no one.

Mrs Trafford understood quite well what his thoughts were when, that evening at dinner, he told her he would like to go to Italy.

Travelling abroad had never occurred

to her. She had had the vague longing all true Christians have to visit Jerusalem, but her mind rarely soared to dreams. They had none too much money to spare. She had hoped that he would have suggested the seaside, or a cottage by the river, for his autumn holiday, or at most a trip to Wales. It was as if Mary Fellcroft had spoken to her through Harold.

"Is she going to Italy?" she asked with a mischievous smile, which she tried not to permit to become bitter.

"She . . . Who? . . . Oh, you mean Lady Fellcroft? . . . She says she may end there, but they are going to Switzerland first."

"Switzerland I have always wanted to see."

Mrs Trafford was wondering whether Harold meant her to go with him. She was always afraid of hampering his freedom.

"Why not go with them?" . . .

"Oh, they don't want an old woman like me!"

"Fishing as usual," he said. "Do you

know, mother—no, really, it is true—to-day when I saw you coming down the street, I said to myself, 'That's a well-set-up young woman!' And then, as you came down, I saw it was you."

"Don't be absurd, Harold." But a faint blush of pleasure overspread her cheeks. The subject of the journey to Italy was abandoned for the moment.

"I'm afraid you've been unkind to John the Baptist. Won't become a 'vert, I suppose." This was the way Mr Lister invited his daughter's confidence; and she laughed her quiet, little, well-bred laugh, and said—

"Oh, I am not at all discouraged; he thinks far too deeply to be hurried into anything. I wouldn't have him jump at it."

"Then you quite look upon him as trapped, eh? Confession, purgatory, penance, fasting—swallows it all, I suppose, if you tell him it's all right."

"Oh, father, how can you!"

"Well, he's a remarkably nice young man, and they tell me that he's a very

rising young barrister. Really Hepworth grew quite enthusiastic over him."

Mary felt a hot flush rise to her face; they had been making inquiries about Harold. Was that horrid, horrid marriage question to creep into every niche of life, when it was a question of friendship between a man and a woman?

"He certainly is above the average," she said, a little boldly.

"Above the average! I should think so, indeed. Doesn't eat, or drink, or smoke. . . . But human, eh, after all?" . . . Mr Lister carried his fat, open hand to his heart.

"You are too absurd, father. Surely you are not going to take that idea into your head. Why, he is a mere boy!" . . .

"Think of the moulding possibilities!" Mr Lister opened and shut his fingers as if he were manipulating clay.

"Now, father, you really mustn't. You know we agreed we were never to speak of that. It is only two years ago; how can you expect me to forget? . . . Besides, it has never occurred to either of us. I'm

sure he would be horrorstruck if you mentioned such an idea to him. Thank heaven, in the twentieth century a woman can have a man friend without being obliged to marry him!"

Mr Lister thought to himself that the centuries had brought little change into the sex question, but he said no more.

He had already said too much, Mary Fellcroft thought.

CHAPTER III.

In a very unfashionable street off Bloomsbury Square, the Reverend Matthew Du Pré sat at the dining-room table, his head resting on his hands. The dining-room was allowed him as a sitting-room by a landlady who mothered the Church because she was the widow of a churchwarden. His proper den, his own peculiar sanctum, was a little back room on the third floor; but after the evening meal had been removed, the dining-room table with its hanging gas monstrosity, its maroon table cloth with its double-edged border of gold silk, was given up to his papers and vagaries.

The Reverend Matthew Du Pré was one of the five curates of St Wulstan-in-the Fields. Why St Wulstan, and why in the fields, no one could ever tell—no one cared

to know. Perhaps Sir Walter Besant could have told them, but none of the five curates knew Sir Walter Besant or ever had time to read his books. Of the five curates the Reverend Matthew was the only one with any pretensions to being a gentleman, or at all events a man of the world. The result was that he was, as the landlady phrased it, "put upon" by the vicar, and what the vicar did not put upon him he took himself; for he was full of ideas was the Reverend Matthew, and he took life with an earnestness which was fatal. For real failure in life give me earnestness. A man with a conviction is like a man who has inherited a fatal disease. The end of it can only be sure and certain death. The Reverend Matthew had taken religion severely. He looked upon duty with a sensitiveness that was almost pain, and he was really anxious to save souls. Now, a curate who saves souls is an abnormal thing; like a private who attempts to command a regiment, he must be made to stand at attention at once. Everyone knows the German story:

"What's the matter with you, Corporal Braun?" . . .

"I had an idea."

"Then don't have it again. Three weeks to barracks!"

The Reverend Matthew had ideas—ideas in which he was not backed up by his vicar, who, having brought a peer's daughter to the commodious vicarage in Soho, realised that the true mission of the clergy was to snatch aristocratic brands from the burning.

"The poor ye have always with you," but not the peers' daughters. The poor will keep. The peers' daughters won't. They need a deal of keeping.

To-night, beneath the flaring gas centre-piece of the horsehair dining-room, the Reverend Matthew Du Pré wondered if he had attempted too much, and chided himself for his discouragement.

"By all means try it, if you think you can manage it," the vicar had said, "but you must manage it alone. It would never do for me to associate myself with a failure." Then, as the curate had ap-

pealed mutely by the expression of his eyes, which were very speaking, he had added:

"Remember, I am with you in spirit, if absent in the flesh. I wish you success. My prayers go with you." The Reverend Matthew was too weak to even ask himself whether the prayers of the vicar were effectual and fervent. The day of revolt had not come—would perhaps never come. There are revolts that do not float to the surface, undercurrents that do not seethe to eddies, but spread themselves beneath the rushing torrents and mingle with strong waters. What the Reverend Matthew had recognised feebly was that religion without "booming" is about as slow an investment as you can embark upon.

The matrons of Bloomsbury had held their breath at the very mention of the curate's scheme. He knew from the vicar that the West End held their sides whenever it was mentioned; but he held on to it, as a mother holds on to her crippled, imbecile child, and walks it about

lest any should think she is ashamed of it.

There they lay, the little pamphlets, the little printed forms, to which people were supposed to sign their names to subscriptions.

"Men's Rescue Work" in the East End of London. It had been a bold, trenchant idea,—so bold, so trenchant, that no one would have thought it could have occurred to the sallow-faced "altar waiter," Matthew Du Pré—Matthew de Courcy Du Pré, as a matter of fact. The idea was beautiful; the practice impossible. The Bishop of the diocese, who, like most bishops, never interfered, had only for one moment thought that he must interfere; only if he did, a question might be asked in the "House," and the only thing a bishop fears is the "House." The Sovereign, after all, is nothing but what he wishes to make himself. If he likes he can turn his personal influence into despotism or its equivalent. That depends on his personality. But the "House," that, after all, is the board that sits on

sovereigns. But the Bishop waited, as good bishops do, till there is a scandal before he interfered; and the Reverend Matthew stood alone with his scheme, trembling by the side of it, wishing he had been something bigger and stronger, looking like a dwarf who leads an elephant, or a bantam who has laid an egg the size of an ostrich's. Mutely he appealed to the world, to common-sense, to virtue, to come and relieve him of his offspring. Gladly would he have left it on the doorstep of the strong, have rung the bell and run away. But where are the strong? . . . He didn't know where to find them. Had it not been for Harold Trafford he would have relinquished the work. After all, the beauty of a layman is his freedom. There is immense power in being "out of court." The layman is "the man in the street," and "the man in the street" is the divinity who knows all, guesses all, and insists.

The man in the street is the beadle of humanity. He alone dares rap the little boy on the head, and pull the parson's

sleeve when he gives out the wrong hymn.

He could have hardly told you, the Reverend Matthew, how the idea came to him. He had been at the deathbed of a costermonger's sister who had died giving birth to her child. Half an hour before her death she had cried out to him—

"It's you men as ought to keep us as is our damned curse. Blast the whole lot of you!"

Often and often it had seemed to the Reverend Matthew as if he could hear the woman's curse ringing in his ears. Men ruining women! Why not men saving women? . . . Men, with their immense sexual influence, doing rescue work? . . . Going to their fallen sisters, and saying—"We want nothing of you but your soul. We will give you friendship, protection. We will reinstate you. It is our mission. Woman was given to man to cherish and protect. From men alone can emanate the mission of purity."

Men are less incredulous than women,

far more childlike, far more enthusiastic. The Reverend Matthew had found many who fell in with his views, but to-night he was face to face with a hideous problem. The secretary of the Blackheath Branch of the M. R. W. had reported a terrible, terrible case. He had heard to-day that Mr Ronald Vivian, the visitor of the Rigniel Buildings district, had taken the girl Hester Pallison away from the Knight Home, and was living with her at Richmond. The Reverend Matthew was quite alive to the drawbacks of his scheme, but to-night they had been more viciously put before him than usual. It was just what the vicar had said would be the danger.

"You are placing Daniel in the lions' den; you know all lions are not like Daniel's. There are many wives of Potiphar, but there are few Josephs."

It had occurred to the Reverend Matthew that the vicar spoke only from West End experience, and that in the West End there were many wives of Potiphar, and more Davids than Josephs,—

Davids who place the husband of coveted wives in the foremost ranks, and wish ill to their enemies. The Reverend Matthew was strongly against the use of the psalms in the daily service.

"Was it failure?" he asked himself. . . . "Or was this a discouragement from the devil? . . . Must his work cease?" . . . It was ten o'clock, and the bell rang. Five minutes later the ring of the bell would have been abnormal, but at ten it was still natural, permissible. He went to open the door. There was a tacit understanding between him and the landlady, that if people should ring after ten he mustn't expect Sarah, who had to be dressed at six in the morning, to answer the bell. Perhaps nothing on earth could have refreshed and rekindled his drooping spirits more than the sight of the person who stood outside.

"After all, God does answer prayer," he said to himself, as if he had ever doubted it.

"Good business!" said the Reverend

Matthew, as he stood aside to let Harold Trafford in. The Reverend Matthew wheeled an armchair round, pushed his friend into it. Harold took a pipe out of his pocket, and the Reverend Matthew provided tobacco.

"I've come to ask you to dine to-morrow."

The Reverend Matthew's face brightened as he accepted. The cobwebs of the M. R. W. seemed to dispel gradually.

"I'm game for any amount of work. I suppose there's nothing."

The Reverend Matthew hesitated.

"Don't mind me."

Briefly he told him of the case of Ronald Vivian.

"Just as you rang, I was wondering if, after all, I had made a mistake undertaking too much."

"Rot!"

He felt philipped by the boyish word as if by mountain air.

"We are bound to have some failures. Why, I thought you were prepared for this!"

"I think I'm a bit down—overwork, perhaps; the summer has been trying."

The Reverend Matthew got up and lit a pipe. Harold Trafford was ozone to him.

"It would be a thousand pities if we failed."

"We shan't fail!"

"I'm glad to hear you say that."

"I came to see if you couldn't give me anything to do."

"I've an awfully sad case." The Reverend Matthew hesitated. He was thinking of all he had heard of the woman he was about to entrust to Harold. "Beautiful as Venus," some one had said.

"There's a case ought to be seen to to-morrow."

"Where is it?"

"Pimlico," said the Reverend Matthew, not conscious of the humour of his words as they sounded to lay ears.

Harold suppressed a smile.

"Awfully sad case,—a farmer's daughter, —went on the stage,—kept for three years

by Lord Charles Joyce,—he's going to be married next week,—the girl, madly in love with him, talks of suicide, etc., etc.,—got a lovely voice, I believe,—could be got to take an interest in music."

"What's the address?"

The Reverend Matthew took up some letters, referred to a note-book. "46 Lion Street, Chelsea."

Harold wrote down the address in his pocket-book. "I'll go to-morrow."

"They say she's very pretty"—the Reverend Matthew thought it his duty to say this.

On Harold's lips was the flippant rejoinder, "All the better"; then he remembered the sacredness of his mission. "I'll tell you about it when I've seen her."

Then the Reverend Matthew remembered Oxford days, got a bottle of whisky out of the cupboard. There was very little, but they managed to share it.

Then the Reverend Matthew disclosed his disillusions, and Harold spoke to him of Lady Fellcroft and of Rome. "The

force of the Church of Rome is its centralisation, its government, its mechanism," said the Reverend Matthew, thinking of his vicar and the bishop.

Just the words he had heard so often from Mary Fellcroft's lips and from the lips of the priest. Was it so, indeed, that a great machinery of discipline alone could achieve?

Yet, what good machinery, mechanism, if the cog-wheels were dull, colourless, irresponsive? As he sat there in the horsehair armchair, his hand grasping the tassel, the flaring gaslight catching his eyes painfully and the shade casting darkness on the very portion of the curate's face he wished most to see, it seemed to him for the first time almost as if the only religion that appealed to him was mysticism, the Ecclesia in ecclesia.

All the mechanism, all the machinery in the world, what was it side by side with one touch of revelation, one whisper of the eternal to the individual man? The tale told personally, impressed again

upon thousands by conveyed personality; yet as he sat there and listened to the Reverend Matthew he thought he could hear Mary Fellcroft's voice saying, "It is all so clearly what was meant; it is so reasonable, so all sufficing."

"Does it not govern rather by a system of riding roughshod over argument, instinct, common-sense even?" . . .

The Reverend Matthew laughed.

"You musn't think that I am going over to Rome; but one can't, of course, help admiring the whole system of the Roman Church. Its unity, its lasting power, its intense power of supply to meet the growing demands of the years, and yet the calm, grand way in which it brings forth nothing new,—a bell ringing out the same peal from an iron, immoveable belfry, from age to age, across centuries; and never questioning the accuracy of its tone, the clearness of its clanging, certain that till the end of time the peal is to be the same—unchanged, persistent, unhushable as if it were hung to the rafters of Heaven itself!"

"Yet somehow one cannot imagine a force, a mass, a crowd, a group even, where Christ is concerned. Everything in the personal presentment of Him in the Gospels gives the idea of individual, silent speaking of the soul to the soul—each soul understanding Christ, receiving Him differently, just as towards the silent falling of the dew each plant and flower turns differently, receives the cool refreshment in some peculiar way. Look at the different ways in which Christ impressed Mary Magdalene, Lazarus, Nicodemus, Pilate; look at the emotion of Peter as compared with others.

"Yet the Holy Spirit spoke equally to thousands on the day of Pentecost."

As the Reverend Matthew spoke, Harold got up, and with his two hands in his pockets paced the room.

"Du Pré, does it not occur to you sometimes that one gives much too much importance to the different names of Faiths? Does it not seem to you that somewhere there is a religion that could unite all faiths, all beliefs? Can you imagine an Angli-

canism without discussions or sects; a Romanism without superstitions, without bigotry; a Protestantism without bitterness? Does it never occur to you that one day there will arise one who will blend them and bid us follow beyond the hills of Ritual and of religious discussion?" . . .

"That one has come and gone," said the Reverend Matthew with a touch of sadness.

"You mean Christ?" . . .

As the solemn crystallic Purity of the name fell on the night's stillness, it seemed to Harold as if some presence hovered near him, as if he could hear a voice crying to him from the wilderness—

"Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make His paths straight."

The Reverend Matthew bowed his head. To-night he felt dreadfully discouraged. The little dining-room looked more sordid than it had before Harold's entrance. He was so fresh looking, so smart, so modern.

"I often wonder, Trafford, how it is that you never went into the Church."

"If I had I should have gone into the Roman Church, I think."

The Reverend Matthew looked up surprised.

"Merely, I think, because it understands the entirety of priesthood better. An Anglican clergyman, especially a married one, always seems to me wanting in complete dedication to his work, as if he were trying to unite God and Mammon. Of course, it is absurd to expect a clergyman not to be human, and yet somehow that is what one does expect. At heart everyone knows that complete abnegation of all human ties was the strength of the Christ. Had it been otherwise, one could never have thought of Him as of the central figure of those days as one does. He stands out more from his isolation almost than from anything else. The picture that appeals to me least of any in the world is the Last Supper of Leonardo da Vinci, in which St John is leaning on our Lord's bosom. It at once takes away from the grandeur of the individuality of Christ."

"You expect too much of humanity," said the Reverend Matthew, with a weak laugh. Hadn't he been over all this ground again and again with himself?

"The question is, does a man ever give himself a chance of climbing the heights to which he can reach?"

"St Augustine." The Reverend Du Pré felt, as he spoke, that he himself would never be a St Augustine.

"Ah, St Augustine!" Harold was then reading his life—Mary Fellcroft had lent it to him.

Then the two discussed the work of their mission and bade each other good-night.

CHAPTER IV.

THE very next day Harold took his way after his work to the house in Lion Street, Chelsea.

In answer to his inquiry for Miss Spicer a woman on the ground floor jerked her head towards the stairs—"Second floor back."

Notwithstanding her assumed callousness, the landlady's swift comment was one in praise of the girl's astuteness in so rapidly securing a successor to the young man who was going to be married. She looked at Harold's mounting figure as she would have contemplated security for rent.

"She's an artful one, she is," she said to herself; "pretending she's going to kill herself and all that, and on with the new already."

Repeated knocks at the door remained

unanswered, principally because on the other side someone was strumming a piano and Violet Spicer could not hear. Harold opened the door gently. "Was she dead? . . . Was he too late?" . . . His heart beat a little quickly.

Violet Spicer was combing her hair, which fell in golden waves around her. She turned round quickly, holding the comb in mid air. He could see by the sudden flush on her face that she had expected someone else. He pulled the door towards him.

"I beg your pardon; I didn't know you were dressing. I'll come back."

Violet Spicer laughed and came towards the door and pulled it open.

"Oh, you needn't mind; I'm as good as dressed. Come in." With a big twist of her hand she caught at the golden mane and twisted it into a coil that crowned her head.

Harold sat down on a chair. For an instant he could not speak. He had not expected anything half so beautiful. Like a lightning flash the wonder came to him

of how that other man could have tired of her. Then he drove every other thought out of his mind than that of why he had come.

"We heard you were in trouble," he began.

"Who's we?"

Harold knew only too well the effect it would have upon his listener if he told her that he had come from a religious society.

"My friend, M. Du Pré, the curate of St Wulstans-in-the-Fields, and I!"

"You don't look like a parson."

"I'm not."

"And what good do you expect to do me?" . . .

There was the hard, unmistakable ring of despair in her voice. She fingered one of the small things on her toilet-table, and was silent while she looked at it with eyes that filled slowly with tears. Then tossing her head, as if to throw the tears away, she looked at him.

"You look very good," she said; "but you can't do me any good. It's no good your telling me it's all for the best, because

I don't care if it is or it isn't; I can't bear it. Oh, I can't bear it." Now her tears fell fully unrestrained.

"It's fearfully, fearfully hard, I know." Harold got up and went to the window. He knew all that he ought to say, all that the Reverend Matthew would have said, but he could not bring himself to say it. The grief of the girl seemed to him to speak more fluent language than he could produce. Once more there unrolled before him, like the scroll of an engraved parchment, the picture of a woman, fair, beautiful, young, like this one, with bowed adoring head, wiping the feet of the Lord with tresses such as these. Surely one who loved so much must needs be forgiven already.

"Would you rather be left alone?" he said, presently. To him it seemed as if it were presumption on his part to be there.

"Oh! I don't know. When anyone's there I feel I should like to murder them; but when I'm alone—oh! then, it's worst of all. Only think—three years seeing him every day, and then to think . . . Oh! it's cruel!"

"Would you like to tell me all about it?" . . .

"Ah! there isn't much to tell. It's just the same, I expect, as everybody else's story. I left home when I was fifteen, and came to London. I was mad to go on the stage, and my father wouldn't have it. I had a stepmother, and she had a lot of children, and I had to mind them, and it was a hard life; and then, one day, an acting company came to our town, and the manager said he'd give me business at once, and my father wouldn't have it. So I ran away the night they was leaving, and come away, but the company went smash about a month after, and I wrote home, but they wouldn't let me go back; and then the manager, who was sorry for me, got me taken on in a hall, and there I met him. Oh! he was so good to me; and now for three years we've never hardly been parted, and it do seem hard. It do seem hard!" . . .

"Of course, you thought he'd marry you?" . . . Harold hardly knew why he said it.

"Not I. I wouldn't have had him marry me, not for anything. Why, his father would have cut him off with a shilling, and he such a gentleman. Ah! no; he wasn't for such as me, but . . ." here her voice broke a little—"I didn't think he would ever want to marry anyone else. That's what hurts me!" . . .

Then Harold remembered that his was a mission.

"But surely you were not happy, living in that way?" His voice sounded grave, but his thoughts were far from being as severe as they ought to be.

"Happy! . . . Why, there wasn't a girl in the world happier than I was. The birds in the air were not happier," she added, with a little theatrical manner that was yet earnest. "It was just one big dream. Sometimes, when he was gone and came back later than usual, I used to say, 'It's all over: he'll not come back'; and then when he used to come back—ah, I was mad!—I used to say, 'I thought you were going to be married, and wouldn't never come back'; and he

would look at me with such eyes and say, 'Can't you trust me, Vi?' . . . And I trusted him so much, I wouldn't believe it when they told me—not till he wrote himself; and then I wrote and begged him so hard just to come and say good-bye. It seemed to me—it seems to me so now—as if—if I could only see him once more, just to say good-bye. I should feel better, just as if I had seen him in his grave, and knew that he was really dead. Oh, if you could get him just to see me once!" There was hunger, real feverish hunger, in her voice and face as she got up and went to him to the window, where he was looking out, across the dirty gardens and lines of drying linen, to the golden jaggings of the great afternoon clouds that look so business-like in London.

How could she think of her soul, this poor creature, whose whole being asked for the sight of the man she worshipped so?

"I couldn't do that," said Harold, turning slowly towards her. "It would be wrong."

"Wrong?" It seemed to him as if an

oath had escaped her lips. "Oh! it's all wrong when it's one of us," she said with a touch of scorn. "If God didn't want us to love, what did He send love for? . . . It's a cruel shame, I call it;" and Harold was powerless to answer. It seemed, indeed, for an instant as if her point of view was the right one. Why, indeed, was love sent to such as these? . . . To him it seemed that such a religion of love made of her almost a saint. Without realising it even, there floated to his mind a vision of Mary Fellcroft. He thought of her trying to domineer over his mind with the weapons of Rome's traditions in either hand; but he could not imagine her pouring out this wealth of love at the feet of anybody.

"One day you will be happier. Gradually there will come to you the comfort of the thought that you are doing what is right—living as God wishes you." His words were weak. He felt how scant are human comforters face to face with human love.

"Ha!" Vi Spicer uttered a laugh which rang with a bitterness that was all the more

painful because one recognised that it was new to it. "Do you think I feel any better because he's gone? Do you think I'm going to run straight now? . . . To go to church in my best hat and sing psalms and pull a face like that!" . . . As she spoke she mimicked with such skill a sanctimonious expression that Harold would have laughed had his heart not been wrung by the despairing anguish of her tone.

"No; I'm going to the bad altogether now. I've nothing—nothing—to live for. There's no other life for me now. While he was with me, I was straight to him, I was. Why, there's a score of 'em—Dicky Logan, Charles Meredith. Oh! ever so many used to promise me this and that—anything—if I'd leave Charlie; but I couldn't have done it—not so much as a kiss. Why, that goose Herbert Lethbridge caught a flower from my dress one day and tried to kiss my hand, and do you know what I did? Why, I just boxed his ears. My, I hurt, I know, and he was waxy." Harold made a movement as if to interrupt her

reminiscences, but she went on as if she were rehearsing a piece for the stage. "But now that Charlie's gone, let 'em all come. I'll just do like the others, and drive in my brougham and wear diamonds. I'd never let Charlie buy me a thing; but now I'll just have a good time—see if I don't! I'll . . ." She stopped, arrested by the expression on Harold's face.

"For God's sake, don't talk like that," he said.

"Why, what's the matter? Ah, that's like the men. I suppose I'm to sit and take in sewing. Is that what you're going to say? If I had taken all the sewing and mending you good people have wanted me to, I expect there would be no holes in anything in the world by now. That's always the way. No; do you think that I, Vi Spicer, could sit here earning a shilling a day with a needle and thread after the life I've led? Not if I know it!" She placed her two hands clasped behind her neck, and looked out, too, across the sky.

"Oh! we had lovely times! It might be just an evening like this, and we'd slip

off to Reading or Tilehurst and get into a boat, and just let ourselves glide down the river, and then I didn't want him to speak to me. I just liked to lay back and listen to the water, and the birds in the trees on the edge of the water. You know how hard they sing just 'fore nesting time; and then it would grow darker and darker, and I could only see two shadows where Charlie's eyes were, and his white flannels shining in the dark. Oh! it was lovely." She half closed her eyes as she pressed her head closer and closer to her clasped hands. Harold thought he had never seen so lovely a creature in his life. Something that frightened him seemed to come into his thoughts. It was time he went; but as yet he had spoken no word of comfort, uttered no syllable of advice.

"Miss Spicer," he said, "do you remember your mother?" . . .

"Rather. . . . She died when I was ten, and father married again the year after."

"Don't you think she would be miserable if she heard you talking like that?" . . .

Vi Spicer was silent.

"She might have been one time, but where's the odds now?"

"It would be worse now—far worse."

"Why? I'm done for anyway." She turned her face away from him, with a slight gesture of shame.

"We are none of us done for," said the young barrister. "It depends on ourselves. Whatever difference of opinion there may be as to your relations with this young man, you at least cared for him. The life you talk of leading would have nothing in it—nothing to redeem it. . . . It would be unworthy of you," he added shyly.

"Well, I never; you do talk funny! No one ever talked like that to me."

"I want you to promise me something," said Harold, taking up his hat, "for I must be going. I want you to promise me . . ."

"No sewing; I won't promise that."

"No. I want you to promise me that you'll do none of the things you threatened to do just now before I see

you again. We must have another talk."

"Oh, I don't mind promising you that," she said indifferently, "because I don't feel like it just now." . . . Then she added, "But I don't promise not to go to a hall with Bill Stracy. He's awfully good to me."

Harold looked into her upturned face. How pale it looked! . . .

"You must do as you like about that," he said, and as he spoke he felt that he could trust her; "but you must promise me to do nothing reckless till I come again."

"That depends how long you are before you come," she said, mischievously. He hesitated before replying. "It will be one day next week," he said, and then he left her.

"Well, of all the queer chaps!" said Vi Spicer to herself, as she heard him cautiously descending the narrow wooden stairs. "What on earth did he come here for, I wonder?" . . .

And he walked briskly along the Em-

bankment, wondering whether, after all, Vi Spicer was any worse than anyone else. Presently he passed a flower shop. He entered it and bought a bunch of lilies, which he ordered to be sent to her. He hardly knew why he did it. But the landlady felt certain of the rent when the flowers were delivered, although there was no name with them.

That night Vi Spicer felt less lonely, and in her dreams she fancied that her mother came to her smiling and with a large bunch of lilies in her hand.

CHAPTER V.

But the Reverend Matthew was not quite satisfied when Harold gave him an account of the interview.

"It was awfully difficult—awfully difficult—to say anything, Du Pré. I assure you the girl seemed so horribly innocent over it all; not the least conscious even that there was anything wrong—and so really gone on the man. I spoke to her of her mother," he added, almost apologetically, for he knew that the Reverend Matthew's great idea was reviving recollections of childhood.

"It is the only way, as a rule, that one can move them," he would say, "to any consciousness of the 'might have been.'"

Harold moved a little. Then he added—

"Do you know, Du Pré, you will think

me very odd if I say something; but do you know that I felt as if it would almost have been blasphemy to let that girl know she had been leading a life of shame? There was something almost holy, if I may say so, in the earnestness and truth of her affection."

"My dear Trafford!" The Reverend Matthew looked shocked — painfully shocked.

"I can't explain to you what I mean," Harold went on, blushing as he spoke, for he felt that his attitude was being criticised, perhaps misinterpreted. "You know, one wonders whether the mere ceremony of marriage could have made her fidelity greater."

The Reverend Matthew was beginning to be quite certain that the M.R.W. was not practicable. He saw visions of a triumphant vicar, a scoffing bishop.

"My dear Trafford, if you do away with the sacred necessity of the marriage sacrament . . ."

"Heaven forbid! That is not what I meant at all. What I wished to express

was the wonder of whether, given the girl and the circumstances, the quality of her love did not raise her above the conditions of her unfortunate position."

But the Reverend Matthew could not enter into the verticities of Harold's thoughts.

"These cases must be met with a certain firmness," he said severely. "Once you give the least sign of condoning you make them imagine themselves martyrs. Make them feel their own unworthiness; bring them to a sense of their utter loss of position with regard to their fellow-creatures, and then you can begin to build up self-respect; but humility, deep humility and contrition, must come first."

Something in the Reverend Matthew's words irritated Harold.

"I don't think one can take any beaten line," he rejoined. "You know what Victor Hugo says—'*Il faut savoir par quel chemin la faute a passé*';" but the Reverend Matthew didn't know much French and failed to appreciate the quotation. "I will call there myself," he said;

and Harold hoped devoutly that he wouldn't. To his mother he said not a word of his visit. He had once told her of the Reverend Matthew's scheme, and he had seen at once that the idea did not please her.

"That is distinctly woman's work," she had said with some asperity, and he had not broached the subject again; but Vi Spicer had furnished him with food for thought. Once more he wondered, as all those who first begin to think at all, what the original intention of the Creator had been,—how from such wealth of sublimity had sprung a world so full of wretchedness and vice.

"If God didn't mean us to love, what did He send love for?" . . . Over and over again the words came back to him, and when they did so he could see again the pretty face of Vi Spicer looking upwards like a flower, her lashes turning upwards also, and the innocent inquiry in eyes that seemed to ask the world what, after all, she had done so wrong?

Yet he had taken himself to task after

his second visit. Was he doing her good? . . . Was it not for his own sake that he had gone again? . . . He must find some woman to take charge of her. Yet he knew quite well that Vi Spicer was not the woman to submit to the stereotyped, conventional form of brand-snatching that would be offered her by the professional soul-saver. He could see quite well that she had a heart that was easy to appeal to.

"Oh! if you would only take me to the country," she had said once. "You feel so good, don't you, when the wind's blowing all around you?"

It seemed hard, very hard, to refuse her.

"I will one day," he said evasively, and the faint quiver of sensitiveness that came over her face did not escape him.

"Of course, I shouldn't have asked you." The voice was dejected and sounded like a disappointed child's. But the dejection was followed by a fierce outbreak.

"Do you think I'm going on like this just because he's chucked me? . . . Why should I? . . . That parson chap told me to work. I'd like to know what work I'm

fit for? Work, indeed! One might work for a man as had been kind to one. I'd have worked my fingers to the bone for him; but make flannel nightshirts for some old body who'd look them round this way and that, and think they was poisoned because I'd made them—not I. I'm going to have a good time."

The recklessness of the voice was so out of keeping with the innocence of her face that it jarred on Harold.

"Has it never struck you," he said, "that there is something beautiful in suffering?"

"No; upon my word, I haven't. Suffering of that sort's for the gentry—same as those pictures you see with thin faces and the hair streaked down like this on each side of their face." And she pulled down two great waves of hair on each side of her face till it looked like one of Burne-Jones' starved, shadowy women, eaten away by emotion and worn out by intensity. "It's all very well to look at pictures like that when your stomach's full; but when you see the real thing, the people that look like that because they're starving and ill

and can't get bread, then it makes you sick to look at them—you can't bear it."

He was struck by the rude, untutored philosophy in her. How had she come to think these things?

"You don't look as if you'd suffered much," she went on. "You wait a bit till something goes wrong here"—she pressed her two hands to the region of her heart—"and then you'll be able to talk of the beauty of suffering."

"No, I haven't suffered much," he said, with an uneasy laugh. Just then it seemed to him as if he had no right to live and be happy. After all, happy people look like shirkers. Then he remembered that he was making no way with this girl's soul, or, at all events, not according to the lights of the Reverend Matthew. "Yet there is an intense comfort in leading a high life. After all, one may die at any minute."

The girl shivered, then laughed. "There don't seem much good in living when there's nobody to care for you."

"You must try and give up thinking

so much about it." Then he changed his tone to one of earnestness. "I wish you would make an effort to forget," he said.

"What else do you think I'm doing all day? But I can't forget—I can't." She folded her hands behind her with an attitude he was beginning to know as her peculiar movement, and gazed out into the sky. "I can't forget." Then she turned sharply round and said fiercely, "And how am I going to live, do you think? . . . Sitting here and forgetting won't pay the rent. Old Cross-eyes has been up twice to-day to ask for it, and if it hadn't been for Bill Stracy, why, I wouldn't have had a cup of tea for breakfast." She didn't tell him what the landlady had said about him, Harold Trafford.

Harold hesitated, then blushed, and fumbled in his pocket.

"You must let me . . ." He put three sovereigns, all he had except a few shillings, on the table; but she pushed it away.

"No, you ain't," she said. "None of

that. I'm not going to take your money and you get nothing for it."

Her words, the unconscious offering of her shameless merchandise, made him feel hot with shame, and she went on talking.

"But you're not that sort, and I won't take your money else. Why, there's Charlie would give me £5 at once if I wrote to him; but, you bet, I ain't going to do that—take his money when it's all over."

"I want you to please me by taking it," he said, very firmly. "I want you to think that there's one man in the world who doesn't want to harm you, and who wants to help you."

"You're very good," she said, "but you can't go on doing that, you know; and when it's come to an end it will be all the same."

He felt that her words were true. Something must be done for the girl.

"What do you feel you would like to do?" . . .

"I'd like to go right away in the country," she said. "I always feel so good

in the country. One year Charlie took me to Margate—oh, it was lovely! . . . When the sea rolls up like that, and falls down with a boo—oo, it's like the organ from outside a church, ain't it?"

"Do you ever go to church?"

"Sometimes, in the evening, Charlie and I used to go. But we both felt so bad after it we gave it up. You feel so awful bad, don't you, while the music is going on? It's awful."

"You would get to love it presently—if you went often, I mean."

"Oh! church is all right enough for them as is good."

"Nobody is good," said Harold. "Church is for the sinner."

"You bet the parson don't think that," said Vi Spicer. "You've got to have a good face and a smart bonnet if you want to go to church."

Something went through his mind, but he hesitated to say it. He would have liked to take her to hear some great preacher who would preach about people like her, and comfort her and do her good.

And as he thought, his mind wandered away. He saw himself standing on a mountain, or in some big church, and beneath, on either side, a sea of upturned faces, and words of comfort, of rousing, of hope, falling from his lips. A great longing rose in his mind to do something for women like this, for the men who brought women to this pass, and left them there.

"Look here," he said, "if I find something for you in the country, someone who will keep you and take care of you, will you give up this life?" . . .

"I'd do a good deal you asked me," . . . she replied. "I'll see. You mustn't ask me to go into a home and wear a cap and an apron, so everyone should know what sort I've been. I wouldn't do that."

"No, no; I didn't mean that. I thought, perhaps, if I could get you for the summer into a farm or somewhere."

Her eyes sparkled, then her face fell.

"Bless you, that sort would not have me."

"We'll see." Harold was full of

thought. Who could he get to keep this woman? . . . He had talked it over with the Reverend Matthew, and the Reverend Matthew had said that there were plenty of homes; had grown angry when Harold had said that a woman like that would never get on in a home of that sort.

"If a woman intends to pull round, she'll go anywhere—do anything. You are not going to tell me that it is a part of our mission to keep girls like that in luxury?"

Harold had been silent. No! He knew that his ideas must seem ridiculous. The great and noble ideas always do. From Vi Spicer he went straight to Mary Fellcroft. Surely one to whom religion was so dear would see the situation from his point of view. She was rich; she could afford to do something for this girl. As he walked along the Embankment, his thoughts were much with Vi Spicer. He tried to picture her in the dingy workroom of an East End reformatory, her glorious hair brought

straight down beneath a cap. The high windows, the grey, unpapered walls, the loud voice of the matron—he could fancy it all—all except the picture of Vi Spicer submitting to such a life. Once more there came to him the vague regret of having refused to take her into the country. It was not the ridicule, the misinterpretation of his act, that he feared. It was the feeling borne in upon him that, if he took her once, it would be the beginning of many days; that she would grow to need him more and more, and he would hate to refuse her as the days went by; that it would be more difficult; that each would grow to lean upon the other. Yet something whispered to him that while he was with her she would run straight. Never but once, when unconsciously, as she refused the money, she had shown her ideas of a bargain, had she in any way shocked him by her attitude towards him. This untutored, sinful girl had understood him; but he was wise enough to know that it could not go on thus. Vaguely there floated

through his brain a wonder at the way men limited their actions to suit the worldly, cold, earthly conventionalities.

"To think that because she is she and I am I," he said to himself, "one cannot go out and admire God's beautiful nature together. To think that it should be less dishonourable for Charles Joyce to leave this girl to her fate than to marry her." Somewhere, in a far distance of thought, that seemed to hide behind hills of fancy, there seemed to hover and hang a picture of a man sacrificing solid position, braving the world, in order to restore the soul of this girl, and winning the crown of life that is the guerdon of the faithful. But the idea was also one of those that have to be laid aside on the shelf of the ridiculous. A man has but one life to live; why should he spoil it for a woman's soul—walk side by side with disgrace; who, because he is a man, can sin and meet no punishment? Ah, it is a strange world; and the mystery of it all seemed deeper than usual to-day. He hurried as he came nearer to the door of Lady

Fellcroft's house. He was impatient to get something settled for Vi Spicer.

She brightened visibly at his entrance. July was coming to an end; they would soon all be parted.

"I am so glad to be able to congratulate you. I hear your defence was splendid. Papa has been talking about it all day."

He coloured slightly. He had forgotten all about the case he had so clearly defended the day before.

"It would have been monstrously unjust if he had been convicted."

"Yet everyone said he would. His not being able to account for his absence that day, and . . ."

"You read all the case, then?" . . . Their eyes met.

"Oh, I read every word of it." She seemed to clear away suspicion of too much interest by the decisiveness of her reply.

Then, almost immediately, he plunged into the question he had come to ask; dwelt lightly on his work with the

Reverend Matthew, and heavily on the hardness of the case.

"She can be redeemed by nature," he said, "and I want her to get it."

Mary Fellcroft was silent. She was wondering why Harold took such an interest in this girl. "Do you think a girl like that would ever stand the dull monotony of the country?" . . . Her voice sounded cold.

He had expected something different. He had looked to her for enthusiasm, and found common sense. "If she is with kind people, yes, I think so," he said.

She saw that he was disappointed. "Give me her address. I will see what can be done."

He wrote it on a page of his note-book, tore it out, and gave it to her.

"Don't you think a great deal too much is done for that kind of people?" . . .

"Too much for some, not enough for others. Philanthropists are like ministers; they always forget to take character into account."

"And this girl's character interests

you?" . . . There was a world of scrutiny in her voice.

"Yes; I think, under other circumstances, she would have made a splendid character. She is like a bird whose wings have been clipped young and can no longer fly."

"She is very pretty, I suppose?" . . .

There lay in her words the quiet scorn of man's weakness for beauty.

"I think so, but then I am no judge," he added hastily. He was getting nervous at the thoughts he read in the widow's expression.

"Is there the man born yet who wasn't a judge?" . . . she asked, with a laugh.

"It is fearful to think what a curse her beauty has been to her!" . . .

"When do you leave town?" . . . The question seemed irrelevant, but came of a juxtaposition of thoughts.

"Not till the fifth of August."

"And you have made your plans?"

"You say I must go to Italy."

She was pleased to think that he considered her suggestions.

"August is hardly the time for Italy—certainly not for Rome, and yet it is beautiful always; and there are always the hills if you grow too hot in the city."

"I wish you were going to be there to show me round."

"I may come later, but I want you to be there alone, unbiassed, uninfluenced. I am wondering whether you will be impressed, as I was, by the stability of it all."

"Or the patience." There was a mischievous twinkle in Harold's eyes.

"Or its patience, if you like." She was not going to be drawn. There was a tone of tolerant pity in her voice. "More is done, I believe, by patience than by revolutions."

Unconsciously she echoed a thought of his, only in another sense. "You cannot fail to be impressed when you see the grip the true faith has on thousands of souls. It is beautiful to think that at least in one city of the world there has been no wavering."

"I know that you will be longing to

hear whether my views change or not," he said, smiling. "I will write, if I may, and tell you."

"Yes, do." Her tone was a little cold. He concluded too hastily, she thought, that she took an interest in him.

"What do you think of Cardinal Manning's book?" . . .

"I have nearly done it. I think it is interesting, convincing from its persuasive voice; but he brings no proof forward of his arguments."

She was silent; then she replied—

"Of course, to us there is proof in tradition. The fact that Rome kept the tradition of the temporal mission of the Holy Ghost when there was as yet no record of the Gospel even, is sufficient proof."

"That may give precedence to the authority of Rome, as it were, but I fail to see that it gives it power to establish certain doctrines—laws for which there is nothing but tradition to vouch for the accuracy of."

"And what are these doctrinal laws

which you doubt Rome has the right to enforce?" . . . There was a note of inquiry, almost of insolence, in her voice.

Harold feared he had offended her.

"Of course we agreed we were to say what we thought on both sides," he began apologetically.

"Of course—of course."

"Well, I hardly see why, because Rome has preserved—we will take it for granted that she has preserved——"

"I think there is no doubt of that," Lady Fellcroft interrupted with a frigid smile.

Harold went on.

"The traditions of the temporal mission of the Holy Ghost, that it gives her the right to interpret the mission in any way she likes."

"In what way, for instance? . . . It is funny to hear you, one of those who interpret anything and everything as you wish, arguing against interpretation."

"Well, for instance, purgatory, indulgence, penance, the worship of the

Virgin and of saints. You can never, never reconcile the theory of purgatory with the theory of justification; you can never get sensible, virile men to believe in the theory of indulgences, even if they pretend to. It is not in the national character of the English. The question of the worship of the Virgin is of course based on sentiment, and on a beautiful sentiment. No one could cavil or find fault with that." He hesitated a moment, and then he went on with a touch of a thrill in his voice as if the chivalry in him moved him. "One realises that, even if the Christ had not commanded the worship of the Virgin, one could never blame it, never find fault with it, or do anything but condone it." Lady Fellcroft was touched by the homage to all womanhood contained in his words, but she looked humiliated and disappointed, as zealous Romans do when an Anglican is able to meet them on their own ground, which is rare enough. She took refuge in retreat from the field of battle, ostensibly from a wish to avoid

argument, but in truth to have time to gather religious reinforcement.

"Of course we believe these things because the Church tells us, and we know the Church cannot err," she replied, with some dignity. "You, after all, have no arguments to bring to bear on the other side."

"Haven't we though?" . . . All the Englishman's fighting instinct was alive in him now. "The Bible says . . ."

"Oh! of course you quote the Bible when you want interpretation. You can make it say anything; but there is only one interpretation of it, and that is that of our Church."

"But then your Church also interprets it as it likes!" Harold was beginning to think that Lady Fellcroft wasn't playing fair.

"But our Church knows the interpretation by tradition. It was given to St Peter by the Holy Ghost. St Peter bequeathed it to Rome."

"How do you know?" . . .

"Tradition, of course."

"And are you going to tell me that superstition may not creep into tradition?" . . .

"No doubt; but, any way, superstition would have been eliminated by the Church long ago."

After that there seemed nothing left to say.

"Well, perhaps I shall get to agree with you." And then they parted, parted with less warmth on either side than had seemed likely after the many weeks of friendship.

It was the image of Vi Spicer that had changed the attitude of each, though neither realised it.

CHAPTER VI.

BUT the fifth of August had arrived at last, and Harold had found himself starting alone on his holiday. To the last Mrs Trafford had hoped that the holiday might have been, as those of other years had been, a month at Brighton or Margate, to the Highlands or to Wales. She had abstained from making suggestions, realising only too well that the day must come when the bird, full-fledged, would take flight. Once or twice she fancied that he had arranged to meet Mary Fellcroft somewhere; at all events she recognised the work of Mary Fellcroft in his mind.

Once he had consulted his mother's wishes—once he had begged her to go with him; but his suggestions were half-hearted, and she had noticed evident relief when

she refused him. Never perhaps so much as this autumn had he craved for solitude. It had been his first year of London—his first year of intercourse with men and women of the world, with intelligent men of the legal world. Never before had he done so much reading. A thousand influences were upon him that strove to unravel themselves from each other and obtain the mastery.

When he had asked Mary Fellcroft if she was going to Italy, she had repeated once more the words, "I want you to be alone with Rome"; and accordingly for Rome he started. The last day before his departure he had been tempted to go and say good-bye to Vi Spicer; then he had thought better of it. He would do no good, and something told him that the girl would be pained at his departure. The thought struck him anew, of how powerless man is to help women. He remembered how Mary Fellcroft's face had visibly grown stern at the mention of Vi Spicer's name. What would become of her, he wondered, in the days to come?

And now at last he was in Rome—Rome, whose very ruins still dictate eternity to the world, who cries out salvation from behind crumbling walls and beneath decaying roofs, as if God's truth had been buried alive there and cried out from some sealed mausoleum that it still lived. Yet, somehow, the presence of Rome seemed to bring no near solution with it. Could such poverty, such ignorance, such recklessness of existence, dwell close to the very seat of God's dictation to man? He, too, close to the portals of the Vatican, felt impotent, unillumined. Surely such closeness to the very fountainhead of true religion would suffuse around earnestness, seriousness, a hallowed atmosphere of sincere conviction. St Peter's, to his mind, resembled a Brahmin temple in which superstition struggled to express itself by tawdry ornament, like some heathen erection intended to propitiate an angry God. He found no rest in St Peter's. Nowhere within its altars could he picture the image of the true Christ. It was

wonderful to sit and fancy the lives that were being devoted to holy living within the walls of Rome. The thousands of monks who had abdicated virility; the women who had abandoned the sweets of wifehood and motherhood; the priests who day and night offered oblation and sacrifice. The air seemed thick with prayers; but it seemed to him as if these prayers hung midway 'twixt heaven and earth, loading the atmosphere, darkening the perceptions of men, yet from very want of purity unable to soar; there seemed to him nothing Christ-like in the appearance of the multitude that came and went and quarrelled and made love in the streets of the city that claimed to possess the Holy Spirit of God. Once more was borne in upon him strongly the certainty that the wind bloweth where it listeth; that the Spirit of God whispers individually to each soul; and that man knows not whence it comes nor whither it goes. In the smaller churches the peace and coolness appealed to him. He sought with eagerness the inner

altars set apart for St Anthony and the Virgin Mary; but here again the tawdry gilded saints, the cheap plaister, seemed to him unworthy illustrations of the open book of truth. As yet the workings of the Church of Rome were unknown to him. He looked upon it still as the outsider looks upon it, who judges from the lights in the windows on a dark night. The very humanness of the look of Rome made him distrustful of the infallibility of its chief. Had anyone told him that somewhere hid away was a manger where dwelt the representative of Christ, a man who visited the poor and sick and ministered, who went up into mountains to pray, who had left behind him all the beauty that the world can provide, the tossed-up heap of this world's charms unheeded, he would have believed in him. An inheritance of contented poverty would have satisfied him. He would have been content without miracles, although the Church of Rome thinks that it enhances its power by inventing them now and then. Miracles

still exist, but they are manifested only in the metamorphoses of men's minds. Sick minds are healed, not bodies—for to be the real Christian it matters not that the body be sick if the mind be whole. But what appealed to him was the grip the Roman Church had on its members in their daily life. They could not get away from it. Each day rang out a remembrancer; each night recalled the fact that somewhere there was a Divinity who could not be forgotten. The search spirit of Rome was strong. This was what man needed—someone to come and catch him by the sleeve and say "Remember." The Anglican Church scoffs at this, and looks with pity on the Salvation Army's cry, "Are you saved?" and quotes that the Roman Church says nothing. It is the Roman priest who says nothing, because the Roman Church has had its say. It has compelled its children to come and be saved. There is no between path in Rome — the Church with its impossibility of advising wrongly, of atheism, its excommunications,

its eternal damnation. Every church that has conviction seeks to impress its followers thus. What Harold asked himself once or twice was this: "Does it matter so much after all if a man believes this or that? One eats and gives thanks; the other eats and does not give thanks. Are not the great truths forgotten by the hankering after detail? Take a man who believes in Rome, who believes in prayers to the saints, in purgatory, in the absolution of sins, in confession, in penances, in infallibility. What matter so that his ultimate desire is to live the life of Christ, to deny himself, to crucify himself, to submit to God's will, to die believing that Christ died for him? What matter if he think that St Joseph and the Virgin Mary will pray for him? Does it not prove, if he believes in St Joseph and the Virgin Mary, that he believes in Christ?"

He got up early and wandered into the churches, and the evening found him still listening to the benedictions of the Sacred Heart, to the voices of nuns

and monks; and all the time the music or the silence, the quiet mystery, the perfume of incense seemed to join in some eternal query, some incessant, unceasing refrain of question that was going on within him. He neither prayed nor sang in Rome—only asked; and the answer came not, or was drowned by many voices.

To him it seemed as if there should have been no bands playing on the Pincio, no smart carriages—and there were few enough at this time of year—no gaily dressed children; above all, no gaudy St Peter's; that Rome should be but the assembly of closely huddled churches. It seemed to him that such a wealth of record, such a grandeur of testifying workmanship, needed the dignity of a sacred silence, a Pentecostal hush, during which the whispered rushings of holy wings could be distinguished. If—if Rome were indeed the House of God's commandments, the recipient of God's secrets, the mediator 'twixt heaven and earth, the Church of God on earth, the invincible, the indestructible, the truth,

surely the very hallowedness of it all would influence all. The very vagrants in the streets would take off their shoes and cry, "The place on which we stand is holy ground!"

But this poetic Rome, with its laughing, white-teethed, ox-eyed maidens, with its harvest of violets, its love-songs, and its street cries, seemed to hold in it too much of earthly beauty to be the sacred casket of the Divine. Yet the fever of Rome was growing steadily upon him, creeping to his heart and brain, and dazzling his senses as the scent of the incense did. All the religion of sentiment was upon him, and the power of dark roofings, of silent altars, of lonely Church corners, began to do its work. It was wonderful, he told himself, how every hour of the Catholics' thoughts and life was possessed by the Church. They could not get away from it, and if they could, they would not. He knelt at altars at which were crowded little tokens of gratitude, of love, of adoration, which touched him while they seemed unreal. He gazed across to further inner altars,

before which floated, in mystic haze of dusk, candles that seemed like ghost-lights or will-o'-the-wisps. In his mind was all the confusion of Judaic ceremonial mingled with a wonder which he miscalled a prayer for light, but which was only a questioning as to what he should or should not believe. Surely, he said to himself, that such confusion of thought, of ideas, of longings, of suppositions, needed some shapening, some incisive, determined organisation—a clearer, as it were, in the forest of doubt; a shaper of roads in the tangled wilderness of men's minds, in which the choking weeds of superstition, idolatry, error, and scepticism grew with a rapidity of pace that was staggering. And then, like the distant call of a bird that will not cease till night falls, came to him, again and again, the remembrance of Mary Fellcroft's words: "You have no idea of the rest to the mind it is to lay one's doubts at the feet of the infallible Church and accept its teachings." Could it be, he asked himself, that all those who were outside the Church of Rome were to be tempest-tossed to the end—

carried hither and thither, alternately dashed against the rocks of schism, or lulled to sweet security of temporary fancy, with here and there long glimpses of revelation on a crested sea of doubt—while the Romans slept at the foot of the Church? Yet, for all that, Rome frightened him. The very pageant of ceremony that struck him with wonder, and fascinated him, yet repelled and appalled him. He was afraid of the images, the tawdryness of the colouring, the bright colouring of the painted St Josephs and St Anthonys. The gold that robed the Virgin Mary and the Christ seemed to him trivial—petty almost to blasphemy; the pandering of priests to the vanity of women, the vague curiosity of children. The virile, isolated majesty of the image of Christ seemed to disappear from his vision as if it had been but the fancy of his brain, and these blue-cloaked gilded images were the disappointing reality the Church imposed upon him. Once he caught himself saying: "Either there is no God at all, or if there is, He must have left some certainty of worship,

some tradition of the real thing." And like a summer breeze that lightly blows across the forehead there came the whisper: "The Church of Rome holds the secret—the Church of Rome. Trust her. Don't pull away. The Church of Rome—Rome" . . . The voice that seemed to speak these words was the voice of Mary Fellcroft.

CHAPTER VII.

ROME made such an impression on Harold, that he felt it would be good to get away from it, in order to think it out. The heat, too, had reached the pitch when it seemed to have consumed the air, and to hover resistingly and opaquely around. He realised that, so far, the impression made upon him by Rome was not one that made religion more of a necessity. He did not feel any the better for Rome. On the contrary, it seemed to him that he could throw himself across a *prie-dieu*, and trust the candles and the incense and the many things that pointed upwards from the saints' hands on the rainbow-tinted windows to the forget-me-nots that clustered round the feet of the blue robed Madonnas, to do his praying for him. He

was a little afraid of the luxuriousness of sensation provided in the churches, just as he had been afraid of the wealth of Vi Spicer's beauty. The two sensations had the same effect upon him. His evening prayers in his little room had become more irksome. He needed tall, cool aisles and dim, dark corners, where he could 'regather' himself, as the French have it. He pined now for simplicity, but in Italy everything is too beautiful to be simple. It is as if even Nature had striven to be complicated. He heard at last of an hotel on the top of a hill where the tramontana whispered on hot days, and where the tired priests of Rome took refuge for rest, together with Americans, English, and German, who moved about from restlessness. The beauty of it all tired him. There was a picture at every turn. His road seemed one triumphant progress of illustrated poetry, the consummation of which was the view when the eye, resting on the perfect beauty of form and colour, sought more for some discrepancy or vision of ugliness to vary

the monotonous perfection that met its vision. The cool mountain air helped him to form his thoughts of Rome. Different little images of doubt or wonder or argument that had stood out, seemed to spring back into their cells. The presence of other people at the table d'hote, and the absence of church bells, seemed to make him feel more human. He began to take an interest in the people at table, or at least an interest in finding out if they were interesting. By his side was a very dull English woman, who remarked that it was a pity the Italians put so much grease into their cooking, and expatiated on the cooking at Milan, when she had visited it in eighty-nine. Opposite were two people who interested him—a middle-aged man, whose black eyebrows and nearly white hair made him striking, and a girl, who was conspicuous on account of her timidity in an age when timidity is unknown. Somehow, while he dined, he found himself wondering who these people were, and why they were here. Once, as the girl looked out on to the darken-

ing purples of the clouds as they closed in the daylight, he wondered if she cared for scenery, and what she was thinking about. Half-an-hour later he was leaning on his balcony, smoking and looking away into the dusky space where he knew Rome lay. Up and down the road there wandered some of the visitors from the hotel, talking in subdued voices, as if sinking themselves into the hush of twilight and of song-birds. Now and then, as the sky grew more suddenly impressive in the richness of its tints as they grew deeper, someone uttered an exclamation of admiration. The air was perfectly still, and life seemed somehow to be coming to a standstill, waiting for the next move. Presently, without realising that it was exciting his curiosity, he began to notice the movements of the young girl who had sat opposite him. She had wound a piece of black lace round her head and shoulders, and he could see her going rapidly up and down the road, and looking up and down the different turnings and paths with an

anxious, quick, scrutinising movement, as if she expected or feared to see someone. But, perhaps, what arrested his attention most of all was the fact, that presently her father went out on to the dining-room terrace, and looked after her with equal anxiety. Then the girl came near to the terrace, and clearly, by the glow the day had left behind, Harold could see her shake her head. Then, with the air of a man whose mind is relieved, the father took out his cigar case and lit a cigar, while the girl slid into the house. There was nothing particular in the incident, yet it left its impression on Harold. He felt very lonely to-night. He was just beginning to understand Rome, and becoming familiar with it; and his letters had not yet reached him. There seemed no links with home or with the outer world, and the beauty of an Italian summer seemed to invite something: he knew not what. The next day he would perhaps be joined by Padre Carlini, the priest Lady Fellcroft had written to. He had spent many pleasant hours with him

in Rome, and the priest had promised to join him on the hills. He became suddenly conscious that he would have liked to be a little longer without the priest. He felt as if he were being a little rushed. He was only just beginning to understand what the Roman Catholic doctrines were. He wanted to see if he could agree with them, or ever approve them. As he went to bed, it seemed to him as if he heard the sound of sobbing somewhere, from some distant floor of the hotel. He listened at the window. The moon was just coming up slowly over the valley. The stillness, the beauty, the solitude saddened him. He was afraid, like a tiny child that is left alone, afraid of his own thoughts. "Man is made for the society of other men," he said to himself; and somehow his thoughts wandered to Vi Spicer. What had become of her —this girl whose rescue he had begun, and left so basely, it seemed to him. Had Lady Fellcroft kept her promise, he wondered? He fancied that she was a woman who would keep her word rigidly.

He smiled as he said to himself, "too rigidly perhaps." He could not fancy the two women together. He wished, after all, that his mother had come with him. He went to bed with a feeling of mystery, a disagreeable sensation, an anticipation of evil piercing through his dreams.

The next day and the next he spent in reading and walking. He was glad that the priest had not yet arrived, for that strange rule of affinity which draws certain human beings to others, had as usual asserted itself by bringing together Harold and the father of the girl who was beginning to interest him. It had all begun with a skein of wool which had caught Harold's feet on the terrace. He had smiled, but the young girl had grown crimson and flustered as she wound the skein and he helped her, and sat down close to her and talked to her in order to make her forget the incident, and her mingled simplicity and shyness had charmed him. The mutual devotion of the father and daughter was most attractive; but there was a restless anxiety in

the man's manner that struck Harold unfavourably, while the girl's solicitude for her father struck him as abnormal, if not unnatural. The girl's tenderness held in it something deprecating and apologetic. It was as if she appealed to him not to visit on her troubles that might come, and that she could not avert, gladly as she would have done so. Sometimes, when they were seated on the terrace together, his daughter would come and beckon to him to come in. It was clear enough that he feared something—that they both feared something. Gradually the curiosity and interest of it became stronger than the curiosity and interest he had felt in Rome. It seemed a nearer and closer interest, more palpitating with life, more pulseful, more keen and vivid in its presentment, more life-stirring than the vain seeking after doctrines that are so involved that the very study of them seems to add to the confusion of brain and soul. As the days went by, it seemed to Harold that the girl grew thinner and paler, while

the man had passed from active, agitated restlessness to an almost sullen despair.

So at least it seemed to him. Yet one day he came upon him in a deserted corner of the garden, pacing it with clenched fists which he lifted every now and then to heaven as if partly with entreaty and partly with menace. Harold was about to turn away and pretend not to have noticed him; but the man turned upon him with such a look of misery, that he felt it was useless to appear not to have seen his movements.

"I'm afraid I give way sometimes," he said, with a faint attempt at a smile. "It is when I think of her."

Harold knew that he meant the girl.

"If anything should happen to me, she is absolutely alone in the world."

Harold hesitated. The Englishman does not give his sympathy readily. All attempt at enlisting expressions of sentiment make him suspicious. Was this a piece of acting? But he felt sure that he had come upon the man unexpectedly. If, after all, it were true that some terrible

tragedy were slowly and secretly enacting itself at the hotel, would it not be unkind to close his eyes and ears to it? To do nothing? Somehow, the man's attitude seemed to explain the restlessness of his manner, the passiveness that sometimes seemed to try and subdue the restlessness.

"Is it wise to be talking here?"

"No; you are right." The man recognised in Harold one who, at least, understood the secrecies of life—the enforced secrecies.

"Perhaps you would like to tell me about it later?" As Harold spoke he realised that it was repugnant to him to be the recipient of this man's secret, but that it was the image of the daughter that compelled him. He wondered what grave peril surrounded them. He wondered how close the crisis was, for that there was an impending crisis he was certain.

As if by common consent, the men re-entered the hotel and crossed over the courtyard to the smoking-room. Harold looked in first. It was empty. The man took out a cigar, and Harold lit a pipe.

The two seated themselves close to each other on the sofa. The windows were closed and darkened to keep out the hot air. But the man could neither bring himself to sit still, nor to begin his story. He got up and paced the room. Never had Harold been witness of such indecision of purpose. It was he who spoke first. "If I cannot help you it is no use your telling me anything," he said. "I am not a rich man."

"It is not a question of money. I am a rich man," replied the other. To Harold it was an intense relief that he was not going to be asked something he must needs refuse. The question of money being eliminated, the atmosphere seemed cleared. Everything else is comparatively easy to deal with.

"There would be no reason for me to tell you, only the girl—I do not know what is to become of her. I thought, perhaps, that you would advise me, that you would know someone in England who would take care of her. It cannot go on like this."

"You are obliged to leave her?"

"I am being pursued. At any moment they may swoop down upon me."

"For political reasons, I suppose?"

"No; I am accused of murder."

Harold's face wore a startled expression for an instant. The whole situation seemed unreal and like a novel, yet he realised that it surprised him much less after his few weeks' sojourn in Italy. Murders seemed somehow in keeping with the whole entourage of Italy. On the hills it seemed to him barely strange that this man should make such a communication to him. Had the man told him that he had committed it, it would hardly have seemed unnatural.

"A few weeks after my wife's death, I discovered that she had been unfaithful to me for years. A few days later, her lover was found dead, and I was somewhat naturally accused of being his murderer. It was absurd, because I was miles away at the time."

"You were tried?"

"No; I went away."

"Would it not be better to face it out—to give yourself up? Surely you can prove your case?"

"It will be difficult, but I would do so if it were not for her."

"She knows?"

"As much as is fit for a girl like her to know. She knows that I live in constant dread of being seized."

"How long has this been going on?"

"For two years."

"I wonder you can bear it. Surely the continual anxiety and fear must be wearing you both out?"

"It is; and if I knew of someone who would take care of my daughter, I would give myself up and submit to my trial, be the result what it might. Anything, anything is better than this daily torture, the flying from place to place. For the last six weeks we have been comparatively quiet, but who can tell what a day will bring forth? To-day, to-night, to-morrow, at any corner of the road I may meet them."

"Then what you want is, that your

daughter should have protection during the trial?"

"Yes." He looked up hopefully at Harold. "That is what I want. It is not a question of money. I would pay well."

"I will write to someone I know in England." This time he thought of his mother. This was a different case to Vi Spicer's. This girl was one of the whole, who, needing not a physician, find them at every corner, and she had money. It sickened Harold to think how easy money could make it all. He felt angry for Vi Spicer's sake.

"And there is something else that worries me," went on the man. "I cannot persuade her that it is best for her, for me, for everything, that we should be parted. Whenever I mention the possibility of our parting, she makes a scene which unnerves me. Perhaps, if you, as a stranger——"

"You would like me to say something to her?" The idea was very distasteful to him. He was beginning to regret

having left Rome. He became suddenly conscious that the wonder of Rome was gradually growing dim face to face with the thrilling and exciting romance this stranger had unfolded to him.

"I should hardly like," he began.

"Well, well, never mind, you will see," said the man, as if he had realised suddenly that he had already put a good deal on Harold, and he had learned well the power of not pressing delicate matters.

At that moment the foreign post arrived, and a servant brought a budget for Harold.

A letter from his mother, one from Lady Fellcroft. He knew the firm, large writing, that seemed to exhale conviction well. He was glad of the whiff from home that they brought. It seemed to counteract the influence the stranger's story had made upon him, to bring an element of commonplace which balanced the unreal, the novelistic element. There was also a letter in an unknown, characterless handwriting—a handwriting which many women of varied classes and educa-

tion possess. It was a letter from Vi Spicer, and spoke of Mary Fellcroft.

"She doesn't seem to like me, and I'm sure I could never please her. She came once to see me and froze me all up. It's true she sent me to the country, but you can't do nothing you want to. Oh, they were on at me awful because I stayed out till eleven o'clock one night. But I wasn't doing no harm, just watching the stars by the stream. He's married now and it's all over. I expect I shall feel better now. I am trying hard to keep my promise, but don't you be surprised if you hear I've left. I expect Italy's lovely, isn't it?"

Mary Fellcroft touched lightly on the subject, and with a certain disdain on the subject of Vi Spicer. "I carried out your wishes and placed her with a family I know not far from here, but they tell me she is very unsatisfactory, does nothing all day, and seems woefully fond of dress. I do not know what is to become of her." Then she went on to ask him his impressions of Rome. "Or, rather, do

not write me any impressions yet. I always think Rome has to filter in before one understands it or can express it. What I found so difficult at first was to separate the place from the religion. It seemed to me as if Catholicism were only around Rome or on the Continent. Now I feel it everywhere. I do not know what I should do if I did not feel it near me in England. It seems to me daily more certain that the Church of Rome is the direct link between man and God, that His voice speaks to us through it."
Something irritated him in her letter. It seemed to him that her mind was always running on theories. Would it not have been better, he asked himself, if she had done more for Vi Spicer? Then suddenly a thought struck him that was almost like a swift pain. Was he not, too, like her, of the army of dreamers?

CHAPTER VIII.

For many years afterwards Harold remembered the impression that night made upon him. He could live over again the whole scene,—how he had awoke to hear the unaccustomed sound of wheels on the high road,—how the carriage had pulled up at the door of the hotel, and how the peal of the bell had resounded through the darkness and silence. He remembered how he had seen two men spring from the carriage, the men whose uniform there was no mistaking, and how a third stood at the door. He could remember for many months the rapidity with which he had dressed, feeling certain that these were the men the stranger had dreaded. He remembered, too, how he thought, while dressing, what a pity it was that there was not some means

of communicating with the stranger before the door was opened, and wondering whether he were awake and what his feelings were. Was he contemplating escape? Would he commit suicide? What would become of the daughter? But there was little time for thought. The hotel-keeper had stumbled to the door muttering oaths and imprecations, alternating them with sighs and exclamations such as "*Dio di Dio. Dio di me. E come si fa?*" And now, as Harold strode across the hotel, he heard the sound of sobbing and the voice of the stranger expostulating gently. And now the three men entered the hotel and advanced up the stairs. Some instinct made Harold go towards them. The poor girl must not suffer the shock of seeing them come and take her father away. The hotel-keeper, reassured by the presence of the Englishman whom he considered at least "un ricco milordi," grew bold. Yes, they must spare the signorina. And to Harold there seemed no alternative now but to enter the room.

It was the stranger himself who threw open the door in response to Harold's knock. At sight of the men further down the passage his face blanched a little. Harold whispered to him that he had come to stay with his daughter while he went away quietly. "I will look after her," he said; and as he spoke, his eyes turned to where the girl stood against the wall with half-closed eyes and clasped hands moaning.

"You must not agitate yourself like this," he said to her. "Your father will come back to you. You will be much happier."

"Oh, don't let them take him; don't, don't!" The entreaty in her voice frightened him. This was not only the cry of a child for its parent, it was the terrified appeal of a human being who dreads the desertion of the only being who understands it, who sees before it the menacing ghost, the phantom of solitude, of isolation.

"They will do him no harm," he said. "He will come back to you." And he laid his hand on the girl's shoulder. As

she turned towards him, his eyes told her father to go. The man gave her one swift glance and walked out of the room. Then, as she turned and saw that he was gone, she sprang like a tigress towards the door. But Harold was before her. He stood with his back to the door, and till his dying day he remembered the pain it had been to refuse her, to see the insisting agony of her eyes, to hear her alternately implore and accuse him of treachery. Never will he forget how they heard the tramping of feet going down the stairs, while she clutched at his arm and begged him to let her go to him, or how she flew to the balcony and stretched her hands after the departing carriage, and Harold followed her, fearful lest she should do herself some harm in her frenzied excitement; and often, afterwards, he remembered how he had caught her in his arms as a father or brother might, and from sheer pity for her loneliness begged her to let him comfort her.

"He will come back," Harold said to her, but she shook her head.

"He has no proofs; he may be condemned," she said.

"The trial will be in England, I suppose?"

"Yes; we are practically naturalised, although my father comes from America, and I was born in London."

Harold mused a moment. "When it comes on I will go to London, and see that everything is done that can be done. I am a barrister, you know."

"You are good," she said, although his words conveyed little to her at the moment, and then he looked hopelessly round the room. It appeared to him that it was the right thing to leave her, and yet it seemed cruel to leave her alone with her grief. Some instinct made him draw her out about herself, and talk to him. She told him of her childhood in America, of her father's unceasing care. Of her mother she said little; but everywhere through her conversation he could read that all her affection, all her ideals, all the intensity of her being were wrapped up in her father. For the first

time it struck him that she was pretty, and a great wish came over him to see her happy. An intense pity swept over him for all women, who, however much they may aim at independence, or imagine that they have attained it, are still at the moment of crisis impotent, frail things that need help; and so they talked till she was soothed, and dawn began to outline the hills and the valley, where towns lay faintly outlined in the morning mist. Somehow, as the two stood together and watched the coming of day, Harold felt that he had drawn years closer to her. Something new and important seemed to have come to him,—a nearness, face to face with which seeking after doctrines and their truths seemed of minor importance. He was a dreamer no longer; action had been forced upon him, and he knew not if he were glad or sorry.

The next morning his earliest thoughts turned towards the stranger's daughter. Irma de Clary's turned to him because he was all she now had to turn to.

The discomfort of life is caused generally

by the want of consideration of people for each other, and Harold realised that if his mother had read his letter with care and pondered over it, she would have grasped the fact that his query demanded an immediate answer. But in letters the possible always seems improbable, and Mrs Trafford had never seriously contemplated that her son might be left alone to look after a young girl of nineteen.

"What on earth has he got to do with it all?" she asked herself, forgetting that she was now beginning to reap what she had sown.

The same day that brought no helpful suggestion from his mother brought Padre Carlini from Piacenza, where he had been on a mission. He had had enough confidence in Lady Fellcroft to know that she would not have recommended to him a Laodicean. Since a couple of interviews with Harold at Rome, he had grown interested in him irrespectively of Lady Fellcroft. It had seemed to him as though, if he did not get hold of Harold, he would indeed be a poor fisher of men. In the

heat of July and August it is a distinct boon to have an excuse for going to the hills—a rest and a holiday on the top of a mountain. Surely, even on earth, refreshments were allowed to the soul and body. Padre Carlini felt as if he had been let off fasting on Friday. Being, notwithstanding apostolic succession, human, Padre Carlini was somewhat surprised to find Harold, whom he had seen alone in mind and body almost isolated in Rome, with a protégée who was young, pretty, and in trouble. Being a foreigner, and a somewhat sought after confessor, it took him quite two days to believe that Harold was running straight. When he became fully persuaded of the fact, he was not sure whether to look upon Harold as a saint or a fool, or a mixture of both. At anyrate he became rapidly aware of the fact that a man of that temperament was bound to become a Catholic, if not a priest. They formed a strange trio in Irma's little sitting-room—for she could not be persuaded to come down since her father's arrest—the young girl who belonged to neither, and who was

full of shyness and a terrible anxiety, and the two men of opposed religions, who were seeking affinities in their respective creeds and expressing opposition. Sometimes they took coffee without her—the two men—on the terrace. The priest found Harold less enthusiastic than he had been. He did not know that it was because he had quite taken to heart the question of the girl's welfare. He was not, as the priest thought, in love with Irma, only in so far as he was in love with all womanhood and wished it well. Under the pressure of her grief he had promised to defend the case when it came on. Irma grew calm at the very thought. And then at last, after three days of this improved state of things, his mother wrote that if he wished it she would come and be with the girl. It was the result of a combination. Neither, for one instant, mistrusted Harold even in thought; in speech it would have been impossible to either to do so. Harold came of those whose actions are never blamed as criminal—whose lapses, failures, and weaknesses would be reckoned as errors of judgment,

peculiarity of ideas. Mary Fellcroft had gone to London in August ostensibly to see the dentist, in reality to find out what Harold's mother knew, and, if she knew all, what she thought. Both women were resolved to go to him. Both equally resolved to hide from the other their reasons for doing so. Their reasons were, perhaps, more akin than they had ever been before. For the first time Mary Fellcroft became less confident, and Mrs Trafford became conscious that Roman Mary would be preferable to a good many people. Each felt inclined to say to the other, "If you go, there is no need for me to go"; yet each felt that to say that would be to give the other's hidden ideas away.

"I may be going his way in a week or two," said Mary Fellcroft. "I was wondering if it would be possible to go round by Ferrato."

"I am going at once," said Mrs Trafford. "I hope to start the day after to-morrow."

Mrs Trafford became conscious that all her real fears were becoming terrors

now—that the ghosts not only were awaking but stirring. Mary Fellcroft began to realise that she was disappointed. He had not written quite the letters she had expected of him. They contained delightful descriptions of Italy; but then she knew Italy: what she wanted to know was the effect that the mind of Italy had upon him. The luxuriance, the radiance, the complete congruousness of Italy, they were things so familiar that she had ceased to think of them. Was he growing accustomed to infallibility? Who on earth was this girl? Was he the victim of adventurers? It all seemed unlikely, this story of a father and a daughter, and the father being arrested, the girl having no one to go to, etc., etc. The real tragedies of life seem so incredible to those whose lives are even or commonplace. In her heart was a little pity for his credulity, much the same pity as there had been for his incredulity with regard to Roman Catholicism. When young Mrs Lister had heard the story, she had carried her

handkerchief to her mouth to hide her laughter. She didn't dare say anything to her husband, nor did she wish to make mischief, only to tell a good story, when she told her intimates that Mary had sent Harold Trafford to be converted, and, instead, he had gone off to some hotel in the mountains with a girl he had picked up.

Perhaps, if Mrs Lister had known Harold better, she would have hesitated before telling the story quite in that way. As it was, the laughter it was received with rather grated on her ears, as his ascetic face, with the searchlights in the eyes, rose before her own. She had always written him down a prig, a *poseur*, probably a hypocrite; yet far down in her heart, where all the serious thoughts lay that are part neither of our character nor our circumstances, she had a vague mistrust of her own suspicions. If, if he were not a humbug, then, indeed, he was a beautiful thing, the sought-for of men and women, what all humanity is seeking for, what all humanity will hail

with reverence, and bow to, recognise, and worship when at last it meets it—the true follower of Christ, the human man who found it possible to follow the example of the Man who was not human, of the God who became Man, of the Man who was God; the hitherto unexistent, notwithstanding the "Lo here" and "Lo there" of sanguine expectants; the Christian, the real Christian, the link 'twixt man and Christ, as Christ was the link 'twixt God and man; the missing quarter of the quantity that makes the perfect whole—God, Christ, the Paraclete, and believing, worshipping, holy, perfect man. If, if he was all that he seemed to be, then was Harold Trafford the real thing, which in some vague way we all think can exist, but which doesn't, for some unaccountable reason we can none of us quite explain by answering, "We all mean to be real Christians some day." When?

It was very trying to both Mary Fellcroft and her stepmother to keep up the tacit understanding during the last few days that each would deceive the

other. Mary Fellcroft knew that her stepmother saw through the whole thing, without possessing the reservations of thought or the secret bits of information that threw another light on the situation; and Mrs Lister knew that she must look as if she did not know that Mary was going to see what Harold was doing. Mr Lister knew what was passing in the minds of both women, and realised that he could only be natural when Mary had driven from the door. He meant no treachery to his daughter; it was only by way of an outlet to his feelings and his sense of humour that he said to his wife on the terrace, as the brougham drove off, "I only hope she will find John the Baptist alone in the desert."

Mrs Lister kissed him. It was just for these gleams of humour that she had married him. She was intensely relieved at her stepdaughter's departure, and could afford to say, "Poor Mary, I hope it will be all right."

The two women who loved Harold travelled together comfortably. It was

in the interest of both to be nice to each other, and the luxury with which Mary surrounded herself, and which she insisted on extending to her companion, was very agreeable. After all, this woman would probably one day be her mother-in-law. At night, in the train, Mary Fellcroft made a little parade of telling her beads before she went to sleep. "So heathenish it looks," thought Mrs Trafford, but all the same the fervour impressed her. The mystery of it all impressed and awed her as the Roman Church does impress and awe the uninitiated. It owes a great deal of its success to this. The fervour and insistance of its ceremonial has established a sort of religious "funk," to use a schoolboy expression. Neither realised that the very fact of their travelling to Italy was, as it were, an expression of want of faith in Harold. Once or twice the women grew closer to each other. Mrs Trafford remarked that it must be a very disagreeable position for Harold, and Mary Fellcroft remarked that *it was just like him to shirk no responsibility. She could not hide the*

intensity of her anxiety as to the presentment of the girl who had placed Harold in this unequivocal position.

"I wonder what the young person is like," she said once when they had rested for the night half way, and were dining in a vast dining-room that reminded one of the dining-room in an opera, with its red silk chairs and sofas and heavy candelabra.

Mrs Trafford's lips grew straight. "Very odd, I should think, or she would have gone by now. Such a funny thing to stay when her father has gone!"

Mary Fellcroft felt that it would not be becoming in her to say too much. She would appear too interested, too prejudiced perhaps. "Poor girl, one feels sorry for her!" The tone expressed contempt and distrust more than pity; it all expressed a certain sympathy for her feelings when she awoke to the fact that Harold would have no part in her life. Somehow, there was a vague feeling of jealousy of Irma in Mary Fellcroft's mind—jealousy that the girl should have been so alone with him, so

dependent on him for so many days. Her knowledge of men and their easy surrender to propinquity came to strengthen this feeling of jealousy. How many understandings might have arisen between them! She closed her eyes, and, while feigning sleep, tried to picture the girl who seemed to have sprung up in Harold's life as a mushroom springs up in a field in the night, one wonders where from, yet whose place seems ready for it. Then they crossed the frontier, and the first words of Italian—the new sounds, as it were, in the air—reminded her of her visit long ago with her husband. It seemed almost as if the noise of the train on the lines had another language of sound. She was tired, and easily given over to fancies. She wondered whether her husband could see her, if he knew that she was rushing to Italy after another man. She felt treacherous suddenly. She tried suddenly to feel as if her only thoughts about Harold were thoughts of admiration and wonder—a desire to fit him for Rome's compelling influence.

They reached the little station in the middle of the night, and Harold was not there to meet them. Both women augured badly from this circumstance, but it was only that Harold had not received their last letters announcing their definite arrival. On the road, in the shaky fly, the only one in the neighbourhood, which it had taken the stationmaster half-an-hour to obtain, the two women held each other's hands. They hardly knew whether it was on account of the jolting of their feelings or the carriage. The worst ghost of all ran along by the side of the carriage in the moonlight, and gibed at Harold's mother from a background of night-shrouded voices, gently powdered and luminously attired by the firm bright moon that seemed to show up the darkness, as the silence seemed to make the sound more noisy, and the coachman's urgings to his weary beast almost a shriek.

CHAPTER IX.

THE position had seemed peculiar to Father Carlini, but not so peculiar as it would have seemed had Harold been any other than an Englishman. He had always understood that the English were peculiar. Somewhere he had read that these friendships existed between men and women in England without there necessarily being any cause for criticism.

Perhaps, as a confessor, he was inclined to be a little sceptical at first with regard to the position. He would not have owned it. For one moment the thought crossed him that the peculiarity of the position would greatly facilitate his task. It seemed that, of necessity, the girl would have to enter a convent till something was arranged for her. He had not seen Irma with her father at the hotel, nor

been witness of his arrest and the girl's despair.

It was difficult for him to picture any other position than the one in which he found those two—Irma, a frail, clinging maiden, solely dependent on the young Englishman's protection; the young Englishman, master of whatever position he liked to take up. If he taught nothing in those days to Harold, Harold taught him a lesson of possibilities he was not likely to forget. From wonder he passed to admiration. The celibate vows of his priesthood seemed as nothing in comparison with the self-imposed and apparently easily won restraints of the English layman. Had he been told a totally different story, he would neither have blamed nor criticised, only admonished. As it was, without disbelieving the story, it took him some days to grasp it; when he grasped it, he entered into it. It was equally difficult for him to believe that Harold had a mother who would come directly to relieve him of the care of a girl she had never seen.

What both Harold and the priest had realised was that the presence of Irma, her fate, her welfare, had more weight with Harold just now than any question of Rome.

Leaning on his balcony, as he did night after night, Harold was inclined to think that Irma and Italy were more in keeping with each other than were the insisting exactings of Rome. Sicilian love-songs seemed to whisper across the wood-furred hills instead of the chant of the Reparatrice and the sombre threatening of the priest.

Vaguely there fluttered through his mind the remembrance of Vi Spicer, coupled with the vague pity for women that so often assailed him. The image of Mary Fellcroft came to him rarely now. She seemed essentially the centre-piece of a London drawing-room. He could imagine her driving a pair of ponies along a Kentish lane; at the head of a table tinkling and jingling with all the luxurious outspreadings of a prepared feast. But wandering along the winding mountain-tracks, halting beneath the per-

fumed hedgerows of Italian scenery, while the air grows heavy at the mating of the scent of the wild strawberry with that of the dark-leaved fig tree, standing breast high in the waving fields of "Granturco," it seemed to him that he could only picture such women as Vi Spicer and Irma. Mary Fellcroft seemed to him the Martha to his crouching Maries; and ready ploughed for thought as his mind was from much reading and much wonder, there came swiftly across the open, yearning field of his imagination, the marvel of the duality of life's currents—the sternness and the charm, the dreams and the realities, the luscious present and the vague, uncertain outlines of the future, the want of stern and rudder, the easy open sailing on a waveless sea, side by side with the brain-tossings and the soul-gloom, the fog of wonder and doubt, side by side with the easy yieldings of to-day, the vague distrust and dread of the to-morrows. "What is meant? What is meant?" he asked himself again and again. Could it be in keeping with the

human idea of divine justice that man was placed amid surroundings, simply for the test of his power to desert them? To say this would be to say that man was only placed in the Garden of Eden to invite his eating of the forbidden fruit; and then, as if voices spoke to him in the night stillness in answer to his cry for "certainty" to be sent to his thoughts, came Father Carlini's words:

"I can't understand how you Protestants can be happy in your vagueness. No Catholic could stand it. You can't be happy till you have merged yourself into a certainty; till you are ruled, governed, steered by a truth—a truth that leads you, a truth that soars above your thoughts and wonders, your doubts, your strivings, your darkness. I cannot understand how you can join a republic of thought, an anarchy of despair, a revolution of all faith."

And then Harold's thoughts would turn to Rome. He would try and picture the cool corners by dark altars, the secretive recesses where something whispered that yet seemed to him too mysterious, too

insinuating, to be sincere. With the thought of the compelling grandeur of Rome's endurance came the remembrance of the tinselly Madonnas, and "Bimbi Gesu," the St Anthonys with their cheap blues and browns, and their threadbare gildings, the fervour and the mingling of familiarity with reverence; the deep learning of the Jesuits seeming to do mock obeisance the while it appeared to taunt and gibe at the heathenish prostration of the ignorant peasant. He tried to imagine the figure of the Christ—pale, weary, glorious, yet humble—side by side with the Pope, and could not. Far, far more likely, the image seemed to him standing against the sky, on the summit of a Vulpan mountain, crying out the truth to a multitude of adoring peasants.

The daily presence of the priest irritated him. The intervening episode with Irma and her father had changed the aspect of things, and seemed now to be the reason of his coming to Italy. He tried to forget that he had come at Mary Fellcroft's bidding to seek for truth, and the priest

seemed to remind him of it. It seemed to him now as if all life pointed, as to its one object, to the saving of Irma's father, so that Irma might smile again and become young and joyous once more. It struck him suddenly that in London he had felt nearer the truth than here. Here his own nature and Italy seemed in unison and the spirit dissatisfied.

At first he had hesitated to seek out Irma, to entreat her to come out and sit by the cool well, with the tufts of maidenhair fern and wild violet at her feet. Now it would have seemed strange not to do so. At first he had been reserved from excess of respect for her grief and her maidenhood, and she had been silent from timidity. Now he knew all her thoughts and fears. It seemed part of his business that he should plan her day for her, and lend her books,—part of his duty to remember the hour after sunset before the dusk, when the loneliness seemed to join in the sun's farewell, and fill her with melancholy and depression.

Gradually the priest grew accustomed to

watching the idyll, and went back to the lonely ways of a priest, and wrote and read, and studied and prayed, and wondered when the two English ladies would arrive. And then at last one night, as he stood and spoke as it were to the night, and she answered him—while the crickets chirped in unison as if they, too, must have their say at last, and silence the frogs in the distant wells, and while the whole keen, exuberant overstraining of summer scents seemed to burden the air, seeming to bask in silent ecstasy of union beneath the cold magnetism of the moon—Harold heard the creaking of carriage wheels on the sun-dried road, and realised that he had dreaded this moment and hoped it would never come. He knew now that for the past ten days he had been intensely happy. It seemed as if they had come to take Irma from him. A great revolt rose in him against conventionality, against the self-imposed law of what men considered expediency. There was a wild, reckless clutching at his heart to wrench the things lawful from the grip of man's fiat, to hold

on to happiness in defiance of man's cramped dictation; and then, as the horses, responding to the urgings of the driver and to a lashless whip, gave a desperate, convulsive bound at the summit of the hill, he remembered that it was his dear old mother who was coming to him, and that she was coming because he had begged her to . . . only he wished that Mary Fellcroft had not been with her. Mary Fellcroft amongst the vines and beneath the moonlight seemed out of keeping. She was to him as "Anathema" athwart the chanting of "Ave Marias" and the grouping of altar lilies on the altar of the Virgin Mary. Rome—unrelenting, stern, persistent, invincible—seemed to be coming towards him travestied as a woman. All the arguments of a provable faith were advancing upon him who was seeking the peace of divine consolation. A few moments later his mother was sitting on the horse-hair sofa in his sitting-room, looking very tired and unaccustomed. Mary Fellcroft had emphasized the situation by retiring to a distant apartment after

exchanging the most commonplace of salutations. She had made Harold feel like a naughty child.

"It was good of you to come all this way," he said, and was conscious while he spoke that he was not a bit grateful.

"My dear boy," said his mother, "I really never understood your letter, or I should have come sooner."

And then, womanlike, she wanted to sit and talk it all over. But there seemed nothing to tell, and he was glad when she at last went to bed. After she had gone, he went out on to the balcony to try and imagine that nothing was changed, but it was as if the moon had suddenly gone out. At dawn he awoke with an intense longing to see Irma, and to prepare her for he knew not what; and at dawn Mary Fellcroft resolved to be kind—it seemed the only possible line to take. She had tried to be so with Vi Spicer, but the girl's very intensity had been distasteful to her.

What Harold realised for the first time, when he sought out Irma early, before the

new arrivals were abroad, was that something in his manner to Irma, something in her childish, appealing confidence, would have to be changed before the two newcomers noticed it. Never had he been so gentle with Irma. His whole manner was like that of a tender farewell.

"I hope you will like my mother," he said; and his heart was stirred by the innocent question—

"Is she like you?"

How, he asked himself, could he explain away the other woman?

"I should never have had the courage to come had she not brought me," said his mother; and in her remark he traced an apology for having brought Mary Fellcroft with her. He felt immensely relieved when the first meeting with Irma was over. "She is very shy and timid," he had said awkwardly; "thoroughly unnerved by all that has happened. I almost think, perhaps, that I had better take one of you at a time to her." It had been his way of preserving her from Mary Fellcroft. As he spoke he fancied he

detected a faint shadow of annoyance on Mary Fellcroft's face.

"Poor child, I don't wonder," Mrs Trafford remarked; and he had been glad to take his mother alone to the girl.

It was the first time that he had noticed Irma with real scrutiny. He had dreaded the impression she would make, and for the first time he noticed how much there was in her personality. She met his mother with a quiet dignity, with a grace, with a sort of pathetic respect which for a moment bid fair to control the almost passionate gratitude, to disguise the trembling emotion which made her lips tremble as she took the older woman's hand in hers and said—

"It is much too kind of you to have come."

The dark pathetic eyes to which trouble seemed to have become a habit searched the eyes of Harold's mother as if seeking for something it had sought for everywhere—sympathy, pity, comprehension. The ghost seemed suddenly to have grown less terrible. She drew the girl towards her.

Somehow she felt as if a dream were being realized. And as Harold's mother kissed her, Irma began to cry, and Harold left the room quietly and closed the door. It seemed to him as if she should have cried in his arms. Nothing was more distasteful to him just now than what he did the next moment—yet it seemed the only thing to do,—to go to Mary Fellcroft, who was on the terrace talking to the priest. For the first time he was glad that the priest was there. The two stopped talking, and he realized that they had been talking of him. The words uppermost on Mary Fellcroft's lips were—

"What did you think of Rome?" but she checked them. It seemed as if between their talks in her boudoir in London, and now, something had arisen. To herself she wondered whether Mrs Trafford would stay or take the girl to England at once. It was Harold who spoke first.

"I am going to Rome to-morrow," he said, "to see Miss de Clary's father."

His words disappointed Lady Fellcroft.

Had there been an intention in them, she wondered. Had he wished to define some position—some new position? What a thousand pities that this episode had entered his life before he had had time to think! "It must be dreadfully hot in Rome now," she said.

"Somehow one does not think of the heat there," he rejoined. "There is more shade in Rome than in any other place in the world." He was thinking of the cool churches, of the great sweeps of dark shadow.

"How good of you to take all this trouble," she remarked. She had meant no irony, but he scented it, and Father Carlini hastened to the rescue.

"Good! I should think he had been good," said the priest. "Now, at last, a little responsibility will be taken off his shoulders. It has been very trying."

"And you really believe in the man?" Here, too, she had not hesitated to be scornful, yet it seemed to him as if she had said: "Are you merely being gulled by those adventurers?"

"I always give everyone the benefit of the doubt," he said.

"What is your theory?" she asked almost gaily. It was nice to have reached an open space, as it were, for discussion. "Do you think that a lawyer is bound to defend a criminal, even if he knows that his client is guilty? I mean, ought he to assume his innocence?"

"Ah, there you touch on one of the knottiest problems that exercise the brain and conscience of the legal world. It has never been decided yet. The tendency to-day, in England at least, is against that theory. The criminal lawyers of the present day are averse to proving innocence where they know there is none. They go in for mitigation of the sentence, for extenuating circumstances; but a lawyer who defends a criminal in these days is looked upon askance."

"You have not told me what you think," said Mary Fellcroft. She was smiling, but her words seemed like a challenge.

"What do you think he ought to do?"

Harold smiled, and asked leave to light a cigarette.

She considered a moment; then she said, laughing a little, "Of course, I suppose that if I were the criminal, I should say yes; but looking at it impartially I think one would say that to try and defeat justice, where it would mean punishment, is not a worthy endeavour."

The priest unexpectedly joined in the conversation. "Ah, punishment," he said; "how fond we all are of punishing! It is almost an instinct of humanity. But with all this you evade an answer."

A faint touch of colour flushed Mary Fellcroft's face as he spoke.

"I have not made up my mind," he said, and his voice was graver than the answer seemed to warrant. "Myself I think that the law was never invented to prove right wrong and wrong right. Taking a religious view of the question, I think a man who knows he is wrong should not attempt to defend himself, but meet the result of his deeds. But then no law would be required."

"You still burke the question," she went on.

"Legally speaking, I think a lawyer is bound to consider his client innocent. A man who confesses his crime needs no lawyer, but——"

At this moment Mrs Trafford appeared in the door and stepped on to the terrace. Close behind her, looking pale and nervous, yet with the air of one who has found protection, came Irma. Harold broke off his phrase and watched the meeting between the girl and Mary Fellcroft.

"This is Miss de Clary," said Mrs Trafford. There was almost pleasure and pride in her voice as she introduced the young girl.

Lady Fellcroft bowed coldly. Then, as she caught the expression of Harold's face, she put out her hand. "How do you do?" she said. Her manner reminded Harold of London.

CHAPTER X.

HAROLD returned weary with the sweltering heat and a little discouraged by his day in Rome. The aspect of the prison room, albeit it was the best money could procure, had filled him with solemn and uncomfortable meditations on the state of man's present conditions, and of how little they had advanced. One often feels this when one is face to face with the primitive and old-fashioned. It seemed to him horribly retrogressive that all De Clary's money should not bring him more comfort than what was bestowed upon him in the prison; the tiny, hot room without a blind and its iron bars haunted him. So did the table which did duty for washhand-stand; so did the tiny jug in which the very water looked tepid and unfresh,—the small,

wooden bed, the low ceiling. But what exercised his mind more than anything was the man's indomitable intention of clearing himself and his name to the world. How wonderful it is, this desire of man to appear well in the eyes of his fellow-men. Harold's mind conjured up the image of a Man divine unwilling to prove his Godhead, content, anxious to suffer, and he wondered. Everything seemed crooked, and his intense eagerness to solve the problem of the man's position left him now prone to a reaction that almost resembled discouragement. He did not know that two influences were at work. It was the first day for many days that his life's occupations had been changed. It was as if a chapter in his life were over, as if the bells of Rome had awakened him from a sleep in the vineyards of life, and not a drunken sleep for all that. Once more his mind fell to wondering as to the wherefore of life and its want of clearness, and with it came the wonder as to whether the Church of Rome had the power to make clearings in the thoughts

of men. And with these thoughts, as a stream runs along the side of the road, by the side of other thoughts, running cool and determinedly, ran the thoughts peculiar to his profession. Was the man innocent? Would he be able to clear him? What would become of Irma if he failed? He had been very interested in his conversation carried on with de Clary's lawyer in French. He had been struck by the facility with which the Latin races respond to suggestions, jump at conclusions, follow the threads of narrative and sequence; yet how hugely deficient they are in technica. knowledge, in facts of every kind. He had smiled to himself at the lawyer's remark that it did not matter whether Clary were guilty or not; the question was how to prove that he was not. He, the Roman lawyer, with a touch of pride, that reminded Harold of the history of Rome in the days of the Cæsars, lamented the fact that the case would not be tried in Rome. But Clary had claimed the right of being tried in England, and the lawyer had said, with the touch of graceful homage which is the

characteristic of his race in dealing with its fellows, "Ah, I know you think that England is the only country in which there is justice."

"No, not that," Harold had replied, with a gleam of humour. "Only a country in which there is less injustice."

After his visit was over, and he had given Irma's letter and messages and gifts of flowers and had waited for a letter from the prisoner in return, Harold had wandered into Rome again as he had done in the days before Irma had crossed his path. He was in no hurry to return. The idea of the three women who awaited him unnerved him. It was all so different. He wondered how Irma had passed the day. His mother had taken a fancy to Irma, with those two it would be well; but Mary Fellcroft? All the soft sounds of the Italian sunset, with its harmonious interlacing of religious custom with the events of the day and the lives of its people, chimed around him. Vesper bells and the low voices of chanting women, the tinkling of the goats' bells, and the song of

returning peasants, all these things reached him, and once more he entered a dark Church as if to ask again at the foot of twinkling altars, the eternal question, what is truth? And to-night he realised for the first time that he felt further from God, further from the real spirit of Christianity, than he felt anywhere else. What was it? And a voice seemed to say, "This is but the pageant of religion, the religion of dreamers, the religion of the senses. Incense is the narcotic that lulls you to rest, that dreamily carries prayers to Heaven that have no depth and weight within them." What, what had been the meaning of Christ's words: "My Church!" What was the Church of Christ?

In his pocket was a letter from the Reverend Matthew du Pré. "I can imagine how interested you must be in Rome. I have always wished to see it, and I can imagine how, with your clearness of judgment, you will at once perceive how wonderfully judicious the Anglican Church has been in adopting some of the ceremonials that appeal so

much to the artistic senses, that enhance the dignity of religion and raise it above the commonplace and dreary forms of worship that have preceded it. You will also, I feel sure, realise the wonderful purity with which it has steered clear of all the superstitious practices, the utterly unrational dogmas and doctrines that have crept into the Roman Catholic teaching. You will return more satisfied that we are more near the truth than any other Church." The Anglican Church? For the first time Harold asked himself on what authority the Anglican Church had built itself up? He smiled to himself, as a rapid argument that was more akin to his legal mind than to his spiritual came to him. Why incense and genuflexions? Why the observation of saints' days and Corpus Christi, etc., unless by command of the Fathers of the Church, or at least by command of tradition; whence that tradition, if not from Rome? If Rome were right in that, then, why not in all the rest of its traditions and teachings? If the Gospel were valueless without

tradition, then tradition taught the knowledge of Christ. If the knowledge of Christ's meaning had become its proud possession through tradition, then, indeed, it could claim the monopoly of all teaching. One answer at least seemed clear to him as he walked up the hill to the hotel. There were only two solutions to the problem. If tradition were stronger than the Gospel, then it was paramount, and there was nothing further to go by. If the Gospel were the teaching that was meant, then by what authority came the ceremonial of the Church, its indulgences, its penances, its theory of purgatory, its appeal to the Virgin Mary and to saints? No, one thing was clear to him now: the Anglican Church had no place in the world, no authority to stand, no purpose but that of attracting and rousing those who would not join Rome yet who find dreariness in their own church, just as a lecturer uses a magic lantern to enforce and illustrate his meaning. There were only two possible religions: the religion of Rome, or the inner religion of revelation;

the implicit belief in the words of Christ, the silent, childlike simple bowing of the knee, by silent brooks or on lonely mountains. The cry of the soul to its Maker, of the vessel to the potter, "Thou hast made me, save me, save me, bring me to thee."

His face was very grave when he joined them at dinner, and Irma took it as a sign that he feared the worst for her father. She had not had a happy day. She, too, had realised for the first time how much he had become to her. Mrs Trafford had been very kind; but the fashionable widow frightened her. She had never come into contact with such a person, and she was more alarmed than she need have been, although there was some cause for alarm in Mary Fellcroft's innermost thoughts towards her. She looked upon Irma as an opposing element in her conversion of Harold. It was easy to see that Harold was taken with her, and he would be backed up by his mother. There was a tinge of contempt in Mary Fellcroft's estimate of Irma's character. "Not half

good enough for him," was her comment. It is the comment of nearly all women who scent a rival; but the idea of marrying Harold had not come to Irma. Her young life had been too wrapped up in her father for her ever to consider herself in the running with other girls' aspirations. She never realised that she had a large fortune, and might be a desirable bride. Harold had seemed to her a sort of wonderful, heaven-sent thing. She would never even have dared think that she interested him. She imagined that her father did. He was in a way as much a cause of wonder as Mary Fellcroft. She was like a sprat thrown amongst whales, and surprised that she was not swallowed up, that her very claim to being human was not disputed. Their tolerance seemed to her magnanimity. Mrs Trafford seemed to her a dear, just what she would have imagined Harold's mother to be; but she knew very little of women, albeit womanliness was her chief attribute. Mary Fellcroft looked upon her as the tall lily looks upon the honeysuckle or clinging convolvulus, and

wonders at its dependence. It was very sweet to her when Mrs Trafford let down her hair one night and extolled its beauty. She was unaccustomed to these feminine caresses, and felt shy and awkward. Her intense femininity appealed to Mrs Trafford. Such a girl she would have liked Harold to marry. Such a girl she could love as a daughter, if only the father could be cleared. Side by side with Irma it seemed to Mrs Trafford that it would be impossible for Harold to think of Mary Fellcroft as a wife. The homeliness of the girl's religion pleased her. She was quite without any determined convictions about any creed. Her father had brought her up on crude, general lines of Christianity that could easily be moulded to the forms of the Low Church or otherwise. "She is just a good, old-fashioned Protestant, only without the bitterness," she said to her son, and he did not answer, for he was beginning to think that all forms of creed were equally deficient.

The days slipped quickly by and yet the fateful question had not been asked by Mrs

Trafford. "When are we to go, and what am I to do with Irma?" Each one kept silence for their own ends. Irma wanted to remain near her father. Mrs Trafford dreaded the result of a 'move.' If she took Irma away she fancied that Mary Fellcroft would remain, and she had quite made up her mind that Irma ought to marry Harold. Harold? All Harold wanted to do was to drift. Mary Fellcroft wished passionately for their departure. She was longing to ask two bold, trenchant questions that would define the position, and yet dreaded to hear the answer. "Are you in love with Miss de Clary? And have you given up the Roman question?" But she was rarely alone with Harold, and when they were the conversation would not roll along the old tracks.

Then at last Harold did what so many of us do without knowing it—sealed his own fate, gave a twist to his destiny by his own action. He remembered the Reverend Matthew's struggling spirit, within its care-worn, depressed flesh-prison, sitting in Bloomsbury in August, and sent him a

cheque for fifty pounds, inviting him to come and join them. It was as if he felt the need to balance the number of sexes; yet when the Reverend Matthew eagerly accepted he was sorry he had done so.

CHAPTER XI.

It was on the evening of Mr du Pré's arrival, that Mary Fellcroft at last seized her opportunity. She had made up her mind that if the others stayed on, she would go. She thought they would beg her to stay, but she realised that she was not in her right setting. There were only two of the party who were at all like her, Father Carlini and Harold. Mrs Trafford, Irma, Mr du Pré, were all three distinctly commonplace, and Harold amongst them lost lustre. They were none of them of her world, and she chafed amongst them; and the effort not to show it was beginning to tell. It irritated her to see how Irma hung on each word of Harold's, how her eyes without knowing it followed him; and Mary told herself she was doing

no good. But this evening the mood had passed off. The priest had ill-disguised his contempt for the personal appearance of the English man of God in the effusiveness of his salute, and had taken refuge in a religious discussion with Mrs Trafford. It was a form of recreation in which he delighted. It was a pleasure to him to make her display her ignorance of her own religion and his, and her narrow-mindedness. He loved to disconcert her belief by some trenchant question she could not answer. He would smile as she floundered about seeking for arguments, and ended by saying with asperity, "Of course, I haven't studied the question; but I'm quite sure that there is nothing about that in the Bible."

Mr du Pré had devoted himself to Irma with the air of lawful affinity which curates invariably assume towards maidens, which is perhaps a legacy of the days when the "sons of God saw that the daughters of the sons of the earth were fair." They had all wandered up and down the flower-scented road in front of the hotel, and somehow

Mary Fellcroft had wandered on alone with Harold, higher and higher towards the summit of the vine-wreathed hill. Now they struck off a path that led through the vineyards.

"Have you seen the view from the edge?" Mary Fellcroft took it for granted that he had not. At the further side of the vineyard, right across the edge of the hill, ran a wooden fence, and against this they leaned. Far away a dim outlining of steeples showed the presence of Rome, and over it hung the glow of Italian skies which is almost Eastern. Presently the fireflies would gather around them looking like stars that have descended to earth, but it was not yet dark. At first both were silent, then Harold broke the silence.

"I certainly have found Italy all that you described," he said. It was the first allusion he had made to their conversations in London.

She paused to answer. "Italy, but not Rome?" she queried.

"I shall have to spend a long time in Rome before I can answer that," he

replied. "I want to see some of the splendid ceremonies, the Pope, the full force and display of its strength, before I can tell you what I think of Rome."

"Of course you have not seen it as I wanted you to see it." Her voice held more of disappointment in it than he had anticipated.

"I must come again," he said.

Then persistently, but still looking towards Rome, she said, "It has not influenced you much?"

"Not so much as I thought. I cannot quite grasp it."

"You are resisting it?"

"No; I assure you, I would give worlds to be able to accept it all. The theory is beautiful, and there is much, much that I am ready to accept."

"What?" she asked softly, as if she dreaded to show her delight.

He still paused. Then he added, in a firm voice, "I think I may say that I accept the theory of the apostolic succession."

Mary Fellcroft laughed almost merrily.

"But that is the whole thing!" she exclaimed.

"Not quite. I accept the theory that Christ gave power to the twelve apostles —power which they again can transmit—have transmitted. I will go further, and say that I see no reason why even St Peter should not have been able to transmit a chief power to one head—namely, the Pope; but I cannot accept that power, exceeding or going beyond the teaching of the Scriptures, unless the Pope can prove to me that he holds some absolutely indisputable, authentic tradition which gives the keynote to the Scriptures." Mary Fellcroft was about to interrupt him. . . . "Nor can I accept the idea of infallibility except on the grounds that all those possessed of the Holy Spirit are, humanly speaking, infallible. I cannot accept the theory of indulgences, or the mediation of saints as a part of doctrine."

"Then how do you explain, 'Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, etc.,' quoting of course Scripture, since you Anglicans can only be approached that way?" She

laughed mischievously, and Harold realised for the first time that once she must have been girlish.

"I—poor worm—interpret that merely as a question of forgiveness. If I, a poor human, can forgive a man, surely God, whose magnanimity and mercy is thousands of times greater than a human being's; in fact, who is limitless in His mercy, must also forgive, and the forgiveness given on earth may count in Heaven; but . . . ." Here Harold broke out into his cheery laugh. "Why, if the Pope can get people off purgatory and eternal condemnation, he is cruel to everyone he does not perform that kind office for."

For one instant Mary Fellcroft caught the infection of the brightness of his smile, and thought how particularly good-looking he had grown now that he was bronzed by the sun. Vague possibilities flitted through her mind; then the look came over her face that someone had described as business-like, but which was only the sternness of her way of looking at life returning to her.

"I wish you could do as we do, and look on all these things as details that do not make or mar the whole grand idea." Then, with a sudden inspiration, she had not thought herself capable of, and which later on she remembered with intense satisfaction, she said, "Surely, you cannot imagine that the Christ came into this world, lived in it thirty years, and went away again without leaving some tangible, certain doctrine for poor humanity—did not show some certain path by which we were to travel? You cannot imagine that He meant to leave confusion, dissension, division behind Him. The real thing must be somewhere, and what responds more to common sense and to the craving of the human mind than the Church of Rome?"

"Yes, it must be somewhere," replied Harold, his words sounding far away, and shrouded as if affected by the falling mantle of night. "Yes, it must be somewhere." Then turning to her he said, "Do not be angry, but I cannot yet feel that it is to be found in the Church of Rome."

Mary Fellcroft's face fell visibly. To her it seemed that his want of conviction was part and parcel of his infatuation for Irma. "What a thousand pities," she said to herself, "that such a man should be wasted on such an insignificant little girl as that." And he was wondering whether she would return to the hotel now, and what the others were doing. Yet Mary Fellcroft was loth to return. It seemed to her as if after to-night he would never be alone with her again. An intense pity for, an intense anger against the obstinacy of the Anglicans—their reasonless, unfounded obstinacy, unexplained, unaccounted for even by themselves—possessed her, and womanlike she opened out the question that annoyed her the most.

"I see that I shall have to give you up as a convert," she said. "You will marry that dear, simple, little person"—Harold winced at her description of Irma—"and end in the most commonplace way possible."

The idea of marrying Irma presented

itself for the first time to Harold and was like a shock, but he controlled his voice as he replied, "I am not sure, that even to attain the commonplace is not a talent."

But Mary Fellcroft resented what he left unsaid more than the attempt he had made at evading her question. There was more asperity in her voice than she had intended, as she said, "Then you do intend to marry her?"

"I have never thought of it before," he said.

And she realised for the first time that she had not been clever, that her forte did not lie in the framing of the destiny of others.

"It is getting quite chilly," she said, pulling a soft piece of lace round her throat, but the chill was at her heart; for the heat of an August day in Italy grappled with the air still, and the Tramontana had not begun to whisper. "I shall certainly leave at once," she said to herself; and in her mind, which had not been stretched enough by suffering to overlook detail, she wondered whether her maid could possibly

get her things packed by the following evening. She reproached herself bitterly for having come. It was almost with effusion that she welcomed Father Carlini at the branching of the roads, while he rejoiced at his release from the conversation with Mrs Trafford. He was beginning to weary of her stubborn quoting of irrelevant texts. He felt as if he had gone back to the eve of St. Bartholomew and longed for the presence of Catherine de Medicis. As Mary Fellcroft turned the corner of the road he was wondering how the two, Mrs Trafford and the Rev. Matthew du Pré, could have entered her following. The strenuous efforts the clergyman was making to ingratiate himself with Irma, at once amused and revolted him. He looked with pitying wonder on the little band of followers of a creed that could tolerate such things. To himself he said that while the English clergy married, Rome had nothing to fear from Anglicanism. "It is always women who preserve the balance of the world's equilibrium," he said to himself. "In

the Roman Church they preserve religion, in the Anglican they upset it."

Then at the turning of the roads, stepping out, as it were, from a sapphire emerald sky, looking like a modern picture against a background of an old master, he espied the two tall, good-looking figures, and the theory of the fitness of things was readjusted in his thoughts. He could see that the widow was visibly disturbed. Had Harold made love to her? Thinking of the Englishman's two past weeks' intercourse with Irma he thought not, but then he owned to himself that he did not know anything of Englishmen. He had read somewhere that they were cold, he was beginning to think that they had hotter blood than the Italians. In the widow's eyes lay almost an appeal, a mute appeal that resembled the approach of night. A vague discomfort invaded her being, and she realised that she was torn between nationality and faith. If Padre Carlini had been an English priest, she would have liked to have told him

what was passing in her mind. As they approached the others, she could see that Harold's eyes followed Irma and the Reverend Matthew, who were ahead of the other two. Mrs Trafford carried Irma off to bed. She had completely taken her over. Du Pré felt certain that he would spoil fun if he remained, and followed them in; but Harold was in no mood to continue his conversation with the widow. Away from her London boudoir, discussing the Roman question, she seemed to have no part in his life. He went into the hotel to fetch a cigar, and wandered out again by another door to be alone. Mary Fellcroft and the priest were left together. Somehow she felt to-night as though she could not go in, not until fresh thoughts had come to her. She was one of those women who are very outspoken when reserve has become intolerable, one of those characters who become promiscuously appealing when they realise solitude. She was a woman who sought crowds when she was alone, and solitude when she was

with crowds. "I do not think I shall do any good in that direction," she said to Father Carlini.

The priest could not detect whether it were jealousy or religious ardour that prompted her speech. "Ah! my child," he said, "one must have patience. One cannot tell what good one has done or not done. One must leave it to God. It will take years for the English to understand. They are still afraid as the old Huguenots were of persecution."

Somehow, Mary Fellcroft could not compare Harold in her mind with fear. Suddenly she faced the priest and stood still. In one hand she held up her dress, with the other clasped the lace at her throat. It was growing so dark that she could hardly distinguish the priest's features. The darkness made it easier for her to speak. "Do you think it is one's duty sometimes to interfere in the lives of others when—when they are going to act foolishly, or—I mean—when one sees that they are going to spoil their own lives?"

The priest was silent. As if he had been reading an innocent novel, and the plot of it suddenly came back to his mind, he recalled the idyll he had been watching for the past ten days. The sweetness of Irma seemed to rise up and confront him, as a dog-rose might have appealed to his senses from the hedge by a faint fragrance. Then he remembered that Mary Fellcroft was his friend, that she was rich, that she belonged to Rome, that she was very much in earnest, that she, too, cared for Harold.

"With due caution, with reserve, in singleness of mind, I think one might advise, yes."

To himself he was saying that Harold need not necessarily follow that advice. He was old enough to take care of himself. Somehow through the darkness he could feel the satisfaction his reply had brought to Mary Fellcroft. Then he added, hastily, "But one must not be actuated by any self-seeking motives. One must be sure that one is seeking that person's welfare, and acting really as

one thinks right." They had gone down the road and back again. Across a blind flitted the figure of Irma de Clary. Presently another figure met hers. Two women embraced each other. The other figure was that of Harold's mother. Mary Fellcroft drew her skirts more tightly round her. Her lips compressed themselves.

"Ah, how difficult it is to know what is right!"

"If we did, would any of us be here," said the priest. "Would the world continue? The full knowledge of right: that would mean the end of the world."

At this moment, Harold joined them, and Mary Fellcroft wished the two men good-night. In the presence of Harold, she felt as if she had been plotting against him.

CHAPTER XII.

Anyone who knew Mary Fellcroft well, knew that when she was very bright, she meant mischief. She was always a long time taking a step, making a resolve, while she was considering it she was always decidedly taciturn, but when the decision was taken, she rarely altered her mind; and she bade everyone rejoice with her that her long halting had at last come to an end.

The morning after her conversation with Harold, she even appeared at breakfast, which was unlike her. They breakfasted on the verandah, and the meal was as poetic as a meal can be; the scent of honey and figs blending with the clematis that clung around. It had been arranged over night that Irma should go and see

her father. It was a favour Harold had obtained for her, and the girl's eyes twinkled with suppressed excitement, a little dread, and intense anxiety. To everyone's amazement Mary Fellcroft offered to drive her into Rome. It would take an hour longer, but be so preferable to the stuffy little train, that stopped at every tiny village on the way. Irma felt embarrassed by the kindness of the offer. She had been too frightened by Lady Fellcroft even to criticise her. Harold looked across at her gratefully, and Mrs Trafford heaved a sigh of relief. She had so dreaded the hot journey, but she had not meant the girl to go alone, either with or without Harold. The priest alone drew conclusions, and began to see the reason for Lady Fellcroft's question on the preceding night. He suddenly felt genuinely sorry for Irma, but he could not but admire Mary Fellcroft's astuteness in thus attacking the weak instead of the strong. He could imagine the helplessness of the girl's position, and some good instinct prompted him to offer to accom-

pany them. "I shall be very glad to go to Rome for a couple of hours," he said. "I ought never to have left it in Padre Lucelli's absence. I shall try and condone all my offences by taking a mass for poor old Padre Tosti at Santa Chiara if we can reach by twelve. To-day is——" He looked at Mary Fellcroft.

"I had not forgotten," she said, with all the alertness of a 'vert,' "Cardinal Zoli is preaching at St Peter's."

"Ah! yes, by-the-by." For an instant the priest regretted his kind intention. He would have preferred going to hear Cardinal Zoli. To himself he wondered whether, after all, he had been mistaken as to her reason for wishing to accompany Irma.

Irma looked helplessly around. She dreaded this drive with Lady Fellcroft and the priest.

Suddenly the Reverend Matthew relieved the situation. "If there is a seat, might I be allowed to join the party? I am most anxious to visit Rome."

"Oh, certainly, of course." Mary

Fellcroft put on her most distant manner.

"And you and I, mother, will have a real old spoon together. I shall take you to Rimagi to see the view." It was Harold who spoke.

Mary Fellcroft wondered whether the day spelt failure. It seemed almost useless her going to Rome now, except to hear Cardinal Zoli. At the door of the carriage Harold talked to Irma. While Mary Fellcroft packed shawls and parasols and umbrellas in the hood, Harold handed Irma a packet of letters to be given to her father, and the two seemed to be drawn into a common understanding through common interest.

"Will you tell us when you are ready?" Mary Fellcroft, who had been regally patient, now showed signs of restlessness. Her voice reminded them that there were others in the carriage. He gave a second turn to the handle of the door. Mary Fellcroft noticed that his last look and salute were for Irma, and that he stood and watched the carriage drive off. She

smiled to herself almost ironically as Irma turned now, and, with childish spontaneousness, waved her hand to him. The priest felt a tinge of remorse.

"He has been wonderfully kind." It was as if Lady Fellcroft were trying to impress upon Irma that it was kindness merely that actuated him; as if she were trying to excuse the girl's action. The girl felt the pitying irony and patronage in the voice. For one instant she revolted; and her eyes glowed with passionate gratitude and loyalty, as with a flash almost of defiance she said, "Kind; he is the kindest and best man that ever lived. He is a perfect angel of goodness." The voice seemed to say, "Even if you take him from me I can never forget what he has been. He will always be the same to me."

Lady Fellcroft smiled. "He has indeed an admirer," she said.

And the priest, leaning a little towards Irma, had said, "I am glad to see that you appreciate all he has done for you, my child." He could see tears glistening in Irma's eyes. She did not know herself

why they were there, except that she felt as if the world were against her without knowing why she felt it. It was the Reverend Matthew who really soothed the undercurrents that were seething to the surface. The commonplace are often intensely useful in this respect.

"A better fellow never breathed," he said, and Irma could have kissed him for his speech.

"Oh, he is charming, quite charming." Mary Fellcroft looked straight at Irma as she spoke, then she laughed lightly. "You all seem to think you have made a discovery, you seem to forget that he is an old friend of mine."

The priest was becoming interested. How would it end? His sympathies were with Irma, his endeavours with Mary Fellcroft. Then Mary Fellcroft shook herself further down into her cushions, and put on an expression that forbade further conversation. To herself she was saying that if it were not that she had given up society since her husband's death, she would have dreaded any friends seeing

her in the company in which she was. Presently she was scheming as to how she could be alone with Irma. Quite at the end of the drive, as they were entering the gates of Rome, and the curate was craning his neck round to see the general aspect of Rome, that great terroriser of the religious world, which strikes down even to the hearts of its opponents, Mary Fellcroft said, "How had we better do about meeting?" She turned to Irma, whose mind could not rise to a suggestion. "Would it not be better that we should be independent? How long will you be with . . . I mean where shall I meet . . ." Then remembering that it was at the prison gates that she would have to fetch Irma, all that was well-bred in her revived in the presence of the girl's blushes and downcast eyes. "Look here, let us say that we will all meet for luncheon at the Costanzi Hotel. I will fetch Miss de Clary, and we will all meet between one and two." To herself she said that it would more likely be between two and three.

When they met again it seemed to the Reverend Matthew as if Irma had been to another world, and returned imploring him to look after her. There were obvious traces of tears in her eyes, yet there lay in them a strange, far-away look of determination that had not been there before. The understanding too, between the two women, seemed quite different. They seemed to have become greater friends, yet on Irma's side there was defiance, and a quiet, resigned reserve that had not been there before; and on the side of Mary Fellcroft was a kindness and pitying patronage that savoured almost of remorse. It seemed to Irma as if in a moment all the possibilities of life, which had not yet appeared to her even in dreams, had been laid before her by Lady Fellcroft only to be swept away by the same hand. She felt like a child who has been taken into a toyshop, yet for whom no toys have been bought. She had risen quickly, suddenly, almost by a miracle, to heights which she had never imagined existed. She had risen

to the emergency of the moment as represented by Mary Fellcroft, with the swift, fanatic enthusiasm of youth. It had seemed to her that the portals of desire and despair had been opened to her for the first time simultaneously, and that she had entered the gates of despair from sheer inability to choose, from want of experience, because Mary Fellcroft had told her. She felt like one who mounts a steed for the first time and who leaps ditches the same day, like an actress whose part has been entrusted to her the morning of the performance. She felt grown old before she had been young; and she felt no anger at having been allowed to beg happiness, and have it wrenched from her like a child who holds the doll of another. It had all seemed so natural, so right, so true when Mary Fellcroft said it, and even now, when weary and heartsick she lay on her little bed in the moonlight, it seemed as if there were yet a luminous trail of happiness left behind the vanished comet that had for one instant flashed across her

life, since she could suffer for him. Yes, it seemed to her, poor, innocent heart, that Mary Fellcroft had enabled her to show her gratitude. It had all come about so naturally. The woman of the world, with her slightly-built armour of a few years' experience, with her glib tongue and her decided manner, had found it easy to manage Irma. She had fetched her at the prison gates, and felt remorse, but no pity at sight of her pale, white face, overwrought at the bitterness of the interview with her father. Tired with the work of comforting the despondent, discouraged depression of the prisoner, sick at heart at the sight of his surroundings. To be sure, they had stopped at a pastry-cook's and had cakes and wine, but Lady Fellcroft had decided that it was impossible that the two priests should have been able yet to reach the Costanzi. It was very hot, and Mary Fellcroft suggested that they should spend an hour in the Pope's gardens. She had a perpetual permit and she had brought it with her. The girl wondered still at

her goodness. She was beginning to wonder why she had feared Mary Fellcroft. Close to the pond, yet not near enough for the splashing fountains to disturb their conversation, on a seat in a cool angle of the wall, beneath a spreading juniper tree, Mary Fellcroft elected to tell Irma what she esteemed to be her duty. Gradually, by stealthy steps and subtle methods she would not have credited herself with, she drew her on from the subject of the poor prisoner, to talk about Harold. Then, looking the girl straight between the eyes, she said, "I suppose, my poor child, that you are madly in love with him."

Irma flushed. It had not seemed love that she bore for Harold, only fervent homage and an adoration that was like that of an Eastern slave for her master. Yet as Mary Fellcroft spoke, it seemed to her that she had unconsciously loved him, and only knew it now. She never remembered that she was rich, as Lady Fellcroft spoke, nor very pretty and surpassingly sweet and feminine

in her appearance, She only realised that a woman, powerful and rich, like Mary Fellcroft, knew what was good for him, and would see him have it. Irma had blushed and looked distressed, then burst into tears, and cried, "I never thought of him, except as of the kindest friend I ever had met."

And then Mary Fellcroft had tried to soothe her, only to make her ready for what was to come. "Ah, my dear child, I don't wonder at your caring for him. He is a wonderful man, and he must fulfil a great and glorious career; but he is so good, so tender-hearted, he would do anything for anyone in trouble, he is a man who would ruin his whole fortune, risk his life to save a dog from drowning: he must be protected from himself." Then first patting the girl's hand, then clasping it firmly, "I am sure you are the last girl in this world to wish to be married out of pity or to stand in the way of anyone who has been so kind and good." As Mary Fellcroft spoke it seemed as if Irma shrank back on the seat, recoiled

physically as she did morally at the picture Lady Fellcroft presented to her.

Once she said, feebly, "But I don't think he ever thought of marrying me." And Mary Fellcroft wondered if she had been quite wise, but she redeemed her indiscretion, so she thought, by saying, "No, dear, I don't suppose he did; but if people were to say anything, you know what the world is." Irma felt sure that Mary Fellcroft was aware that she knew nothing of the world. All she realised was that Mary Fellcroft had turned the most beautiful episode of her life into ghastly discomfort. How terribly apparent her adoration for him must have seemed since Mary Fellcroft saw through it. Was it possible that Harold had made Lady Fellcroft his mouth-piece? No; something told her, that would not be the way he would do things. To her, grief and disappointment seemed a natural inheritance, yet this was the bitterest trial of all that had come to her, the thought that this pleasant surroundment of her life was going to disappear; the one bright

spot, the one soothing of her anxious, weary heart had been the support of these two English people who had seemed to care for her, and now it seemed to her that she could never go back to the hotel, never look Harold again in the face. Had she, she wondered, done or said anything foolish, immodest, that Lady Fellcroft should speak to her like that?

"You see, dear, Mr Trafford has the makings of a very great man, he is a barrister of great promise, a man of strong intellect, a man with strong religious aspirations. He is indeed a very unusual man, he is a great friend of mine, and I think he has opened out his heart to me more than to anyone else in the world. I have great hopes for him if he is left alone. His is a character that must be left to develop, one that none should waylay or clog. If he ever marries it should be a woman of great position, of great intellect, and yet one ready to devote herself completely, to immolate herself completely, so that he should have nothing to interfere with his career."

Then, as she saw the girl's face growing white, and thin, and drawn, she said, "I hope, dear, that it is not too late; that you are not already in love with him." Then, as the girl made a movement as if to speak or to ward off her words, "If you really do care for him, you will be the first, I know, to sacrifice yourself for him. You would be quite a little heroine." She laughed a little nervously, as if it were almost a joke; and something rose in Irma's breast that had never been there before, a feeling of anger, a choking sensation, combined of impotence and wounded pride and resentment. She was angry with her own meekness even. Why, why could she not find fitting words to answer this woman? Perhaps after all she was right, what she said was best. Anyhow, what she said surprised Lady Fellcroft. "I do not know why you should think I am in love with Mr Trafford. He has only been so kind to me." Her voice broke, and tears began to well through to her eyes.

"It would be so natural, dear," said

Lady Fellcroft, "so very natural." As she spoke she rose, and Irma followed her, feeling crushed and worm-like side by side with this strong, sensible woman. As they walked away together Mary Fellcroft grew more confidential, she was going to try now to produce a more favourable aspect. The task she had set herself was accomplished. She knew that she had accomplished it well. It had been painful, very painful to have to grieve this dear little girl, but what was she compared to the soul of Harold? Ah, how little these Protestants ever considered sacrifice in the whole building together of their religion. Was it likely they should, when even their priests did not practise it? To herself she said that she had only asked of the girl what she herself was willing to do if it were necessary. Deep down in her heart she felt sure that Harold's career would only benefit if he married her.

No one could fail to notice the depression on Irma's face, but the Reverend Matthew only read on it that the heat

had wearied her, and the interview with her father had distressed and excited her. Padre Carlini saw more than this. The energetic widow had spoken her mind. He felt sorry for the child, for she was little more. Instinctively Irma drew closer to the Reverend Matthew. It seemed to her that he was all that was left her in her loneliness, and she felt grateful to him for the first time for his attentions, and smiled with pathetic sweetness as he insisted on her taking a second glass of wine, and showed genuine distress at her want of appetite. Driving back no one spoke much, and when Harold came to the door to meet them, Irma brushed past him into the hotel. "Has anything gone wrong?" Harold asked, anxiously; and then Mary Fellcroft realised that she had not asked her how the interview with her father had passed off?

CHAPTER XIII.

THE next day Lady Fellcroft left. She had hoped that Harold would beg her to stay, she hinted that she was sorry they had not done Rome together.

"I could not have given my mind to it," he said. They had gone together to look at the view again before the carriage came. He laughed as he spoke. "I am immensely interested in this case," he said; "and I am not clever enough to attend to two things at a time."

"It is very good of you to take so much trouble."

"What would become of that poor girl if I didn't?"

"You were much nearer Rome in London," she said, and her voice was a little despairing.

"Yes; I must wait till I get back. When

this is over I will come and tell you if I have become convinced or not." The carriage appeared now, only two horses' heads visible as yet over the brow of the hill, their scarlet ear-covers forming a bright spot in the scenery, standing like scarlet poppies against the blue sky.

"Or that you are going to be married." She could not help saying this. It seemed to her as if he had a right to know before she left what was in her mind.

He laughed awkwardly. "I don't think you will hear that just yet." But the tone held nothing in it of certainty, and Lady Fellcroft realised that anyhow his voice held in it no touch of affectionate feeling for herself.

Suddenly, as they walked towards the carriage, Harold remembered Violet Spicer. "I have always meant to ask you if you had settled anything for that poor girl Miss Spicer?"

Lady Fellcroft's face grew rigid. "I did what I could, but it was quite useless," she said. "The people I sent her to were inclined to be most kind, but they could

not do anything. They gave me a most unsatisfactory account. It is just one of those hopeless cases one can do nothing for."

"Is there any case like that?" said Harold, awkwardly. His voice sounded far off. The image of Violet Spicer had come back to him. He was wondering what had become of her.

"I fear there are many," she said, frigidly. And now the scraping landlord came up to the door, the maid appeared with dressing-bags, waiters ran hither and thither, and Padre Carlini, Mrs Trafford, and the Reverend Matthew came out to bid farewell. Harold was going with her to the station. Mary Fellcroft noticed that Irma was not with the party, but she made no remark. The girl was standing alone in her room, trying to bring herself to go down, but she could not face Harold and Lady Fellcroft together. Harold turned to his mother, "Where is Miss de Clary?" he asked. He felt annoyed that she was not there, for he counted much on her being friends with Mary.

"Shall I go and see?" Mrs Trafford asked, nervously. The girl had seemed strange in her manner the night before and this morning.

"Oh, don't disturb her," said Lady Fellcroft, and she entered the carriage. Padre Carlini had thought it better not to go if Harold went with her to the station. The fly was already crowded with the maid and the luggage. As she stepped into the open fly and Harold and the maid followed her, Mary Fellcroft wondered to herself why she had elected to go. It had been a wrong move, she said to herself. To the last she had thought they would ask her to stay, but it had occurred to no one to suggest a change of plans to the baronet's widow. They would not have dared do so. Padre Carlini alone regretted her departure—Padre Carlini and the landlord. All the others felt relieved. The carriage had started now. Irma watched the departure from behind the curtain of her window. She was glad she had not said good-bye, although she reproached herself. She breathed more freely now. A fierce

joy took possession of her. It would be easier to think it all out now that that horrid woman had gone. Did Harold care for her very much, she wondered. And now the door opened and Mrs Trafford entered the room, and said, in quite a surprised, pained voice, "She has gone. I thought you were out or I would have come and told you." The tone implied, "Of course, you did not know she was leaving." But to Mrs Trafford's amazement Irma fell into her arms and sobbed.

Half an hour later Mrs Trafford was saying to herself that of course Irma was in love with Harold, and did not like his going to see the widow off.

"You see, dear," she said, apologetically, to Irma, "he is an old friend of hers. They were very kind to him in London."

To herself she said that it was quite time that she talked the situation over with Harold. If Harold was in love with Irma she was quite ready to approve the match; but if he wasn't, it would be kinder to the girl to take her home at once.

She was sorry now that she had not

done so sooner; but Harold had suggested that her presence was necessary to assist with her father's case, and the girl pleaded not to leave her father's neighbourhood. It had all seemed to be going so smoothly and happily, it had seemed to Mrs Trafford, and now Lady Fellcroft's abrupt departure had upset the even tenor of things. It was as if one had got up to go from amongst a circle of friends, and changed the drift of the conversation by farewells; but none but Irma knew the element of strain and discomfort she had left behind her, an element which would reflect upon the others presently. That day Mrs Trafford was very disturbed. She had grown to love the girl enough to wish that she might not be made unhappy. She looked upon her as the ideal wife for Harold, just the sort of gentle, unobtrusive daughter-in-law she would have chosen; but she realised that she did not at all know how Harold felt about it. She wished he would say something to her. She dreaded being the first to mention it. The next day and the

next, Irma avoided being alone with him, although he had expected her to come and tell him all about the visit to her father. He was beginning to fear that her father had told her something she did not like to tell him. It was the Reverend Matthew who reaped the benefit of the estrangement between Harold and Irma; from sheer despair she turned to the curate, who forgot some of his depression and disillusionments in her society. Once, it even flashed across Harold, that, perhaps she had taken a fancy to the curate, and this thought struck him unpleasantly, and set him thinking further than he would otherwise have done. On the third day, he asked his mother whether he had offended Irma, whether she had noticed anything, whether Irma had confided in her.

"I certainly have noticed that she avoids you," said his mother, "but I do not know what it is. I should ask her."

A day later he seized his opportunity; some papers had arrived of importance, connected with her father's case, and he

wanted to tell her about them. After breakfast he intercepted her on the terrace just as she was making her escape.

"Miss de Clary, I want to talk to you. Can you spare me five minutes?"

Her heart stood still. For an instant she was speechless. What did he want to say? Was he going to ask her why she treated him coldly? How could she be so ungrateful?

Then, as he noticed her nervousness, he said, "I want to show you some papers."

Very shyly and nervously she followed him to the sitting-room he had temporarily turned into a study. Now he pushed forward a chair for her, ceremoniously. Very demurely she sat down and listened to what he had to say. For nearly half an hour he merely touched on business, reading to her from documents, and commenting on them; asking her questions, making suggestions; asking her to make some in return. Then, suddenly, he dropped the letters on the table, leaned his elbows upon it, clasped his hands,

and looking at her with his kindly, honest gaze, said, "Have I offended you, Miss Clary?"

She was too simple and unsophisticated to know how to fence with his words. She blushed furiously, and stammered, "Oh, no, no—indeed——"

"Yet there is something?"

She did not answer.

"Don't you think that I deserve a little confidence?"

Tears started to her eyes. How unkind he must think her! From the fields on the hill came the song of the peasants at work. The room was darkened to keep out the heat. For an instant a wild, passionate revolt against Lady Fellcroft's caution invaded her. Why, why should she seem to be ungrateful to this man who had been so good to her, whom she now realised she loved passionately. But with the realisation came fear. Who was she to be beloved of one so great and clever as Harold Trafford?

"Oh, you have been too good, too good; I can never forget it, it is more than I

can bear," and tears struggled once more for the mastery. "Oh, I must go," she said, rising and seeking her pocket-handkerchief, anxious to break away before she lost control of herself. For one instant Harold covered his head with his hands as if he were revolving some question in his mind that must be answered at last. Then he rose, and a firm, clear look came into his eyes like one who has taken a great decision. Very gently he took her hand and looking into her eyes he said, with a simplicity that made the tenderness all the more impressive, "Don't you know that it is a pleasure to me to do this, because I love you?"

It seemed to Irma as if the room reeled. She was thankful that he had not come nearer, that he had not attempted to kiss her, for then indeed it would have been impossible to resist; she must have breathed from her lips the love she bore him, the first sweet, passionate, simple love that only comes once. But he had not tried to kiss her. To him she seemed too pure, too frail a thing to be kissed till she was his

or till she knew him better. All he knew was that all womanhood was represented to him by this woman, alone, deserted, suffering. He would be, oh, so good to her for the sake of all womanhood; through his love for her sped the love and respect and pity he felt for all her sex.

It had been no sudden impulse that had prompted him. It had been the result of much thinking and consideration. It had seemed to him at first almost a duty, and now that duty seemed to provide an almost passionate delight. To be sure, he had known her only a few weeks; but the circumstances under which they had met, the daily intercourse, had made them known to each other in a way which months of ordinary courting might not have done. He could read in this girl's heart a purity, a guilelessness which, though he knew it not, resembled his own. It was as if two lilies had met in a garden and bowed to each other, it would be the mating of doves in God's pure sky. The full consciousness of his love for her had come through the distress he had felt at her

coldness during the last few days. So it was that for the moment Mary Fellcroft did not reap the havest she had sown, though her harvest would come by-and-by.

"Oh, no, no; don't say that." Those were the words that Irma used in response to his outburst of love. "Please don't say that."

For one instant he was disconcerted. Then he said to himself that it had been too sudden, that he had frightened her. "Why not, darling?" he said. "Why should I not tell you that I love you? Would you be afraid to marry me?"

"Oh, yes, yes," said Irma, desperately. "Don't please talk about it. I can never, never marry you."

"We shall see," he said quietly, and slowly lifted her hand to his lips and kissed it, while she slowly, too, drew herself away and left the room.

To himself he said that later it would all come right. He liked her all the better for her timidity. So would he have had her let herself be wooed, by gentle stages, moving slowly from landing-

place to landing-place of love. In his mind there was no doubt as to her love for him, she had betrayed it a thousand times without knowing it, and if she loved him, gradually things would come right between them. Likely enough a noble nature like hers would be prompted to refuse to link itself with his till she knew the ultimate fate of her father. "Poor little girl," he murmured to himself, "as if it would make any difference to me, just as if it mattered to me; if it goes wrong she will need me all the more." Then he set to his work with renewed vigour. What would he not give to clear the man for her sake, but as he made notes and compared statements, his face grew sombre. Something seemed wrong somewhere, yet the man had seemed so frank, so upright. It could not be that Irma's father could be so consummate a liar. But for the rest of the day it was de Clary himself rather than Irma who haunted his thoughts. He felt sure of the latter, but of the former! He could not account to himself for the strange

feeling of doubt that kept rising in his mind.

It had become a habit to him to stand on his balcony and smoke, and look towards Rome either twinkling in the far distance, or lying moon-washed and comatose in the illumined distance; and to-night, the night on which he had told Irma that he loved her, he thought out the problem. If the man were guilty, it was still probable that with his eloquence, with his clear, straight record, Harold could shield the man, defend him, clear him, make him right in the eyes of the world; check the very law of which he was a servant; present the man an immaculate, martyred, respectable member of society, to a cheated world. What would it matter to the public if this man went free or not? Justice, where was it hiding? Were there not hundreds now at large whose deserts were years of penal servitude? Were there not hundreds languishing in chains who were innocent as the babe unborn, yea, who were heroes, saints in the

unwritten calendar of the world's mistakes? Yet if he had indeed murdered the man, was it right that he, Harold Trafford, who had never told a lie in his life, should lie? Was it God's will that the breach of His commandments should be left unpunished by the subtle manœuvres of man's intellect? Something spoke to Harold that seemed not of this world's doctrines. Would not a man be happier expiating his sin in this world, punished yet rejoicing, than feeling that he had evaded the law, bamboozled justice, and with the inner consciousness that he was unworthy. What was this world's opinion after all? What was this short sojourn of pain compared with eternity? "Thou shalt do no murder." How simple, how primitive even the command sounded. Then side by side rose in his mind the words of Christ, "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." What was preferable, the forgiveness of man or the forgiveness of God? Could not a wretched life on earth yet mean Heaven,

and a life immaculate, according to the laws of the world, be hell? Yet if he failed, what would Irma say? He often laughed when people spoke of temptation, and said that men exaggerated its power; that in the present day temptation was but a ghost to frighten children with. He reviewed it often in his mind, the rosary of temptation the fathers had inveighed against, and everywhere it had seemed to him that a good life was easy enough to a man in the present day. Drink? It was the fashion to be temperate. Ridicule? It was the fashion to go to Church. Vice? There was the divorce court and the Criminal Law Amendment Act. Gambling? In England it is prohibited. Everywhere man was helped on. Surely, he had said to himself, that to sin in the twentieth century was ten thousand times worse than to do so in Noah's day. Yet to-night he realised that temptation belongs to all ages; that the Prince of this world can don the garb of any century and assume the conceits of any age; that with new

generations and new thoughts, Satan purchases new weapons, and when chariots have ceased to be, is quite capable of driving down Piccadilly in a motor car. The temptation that assailed him now was fierce as any that had assailed St Anthony. It was the subtle temptation of dreading to seem brutal to the one woman in the world to whom he would willingly have appeared all tenderness.

What would Irma say if he deserted her father? If he threw up the case, if he failed to prove this man innocent? Did she love him enough, he wondered, to believe in him, even if he went to her and said, "Irma, your father is guilty. Is it not better that he should suffer God's will now, than be white-washed to the world and act a living lie?" As he looked at the pale, unsympathetic moon, looking as it does like a world that has lived and suffered and died, and that only shines by favour, he wondered whether the world would be like that when each man would put away lying and speak truth with his neighbour, when people

would understand each other's motives and trust and forgive? As he dropped to sleep towards the early hours of morning, it seemed to him that Irma was further away than he had imagined, and that the image of her father stood between them. Once he woke to wish that he had not undertaken the case—resolved to hand it over to someone else.

CHAPTER XIV.

Mrs Trafford smiled to herself when Harold told her that he had proposed to Irma. It was so like him to act independently like this and ask no one. It looked like courage, but it was a form of fear. Fear lest others should advise him against his will or contrary to his better judgment. She had often known him act like this before, but on this occasion she had fancied he would have consulted her first, fancied that he would have done better to do so. She smiled, too, at the idea of Irma's refusing Harold. Of course, it was only shyness. Why, the woman had yet to be born who would refuse her son Harold. Yet she grew serious and not a little annoyed, when the same evening Irma sought her out and told her that she wanted to go away the next day.

"You won't think me ungrateful, will you?" she said, pathetically; "but I must go."

"Go where and with whom, I should like to know?" Mrs Trafford had said with some asperity. The next moment she regretted her hastiness, for all the sadness of the girl's loneliness was expressed in her face at Mrs Trafford's words.

"Of course, dear, if you wish to go away, I'll go with you; but why this sudden decision."

"Oh, I can't tell you!" The tone of the girl's voice contained almost a passionate appeal that she should not be questioned nor plagued beyond endurance. She felt like a wounded, hunted animal that longs to be alone with its pain, to lick its wounds somewhere far away in the long, cool grass.

"I think I can guess what it is all about," began Mrs Trafford. "Someone has asked you a question you can't answer yet, and you want time to think it over. Am I not right?" She looked confident

of her answer; but Irma had grown bolder now with despair. She brought out at last the answer she had been schooling herself nearly all night to give, "Mrs Trafford, your son asked me to marry him yesterday. Oh, please tell him that I can't. Please, please, don't be angry with me, but I can't, it is impossible."

Swiftly there flew to Mrs Trafford's heart a pain of what Harold must be suffering, if he had set his mind upon this thing. She knew well enough how he would have thought it over before proposing, how certain he would be of his own intentions before he offered all that was best in him to the young girl. She knew, too, better than anyone else, all the girl lost by refusing such a husband. She could not understand it. Like Harold, she imagined that it was the question of the stigma under which her father lay that prompted her. Like her son, she said to herself, "It will all come right later, when the case is over." To Irma she said, "Is there any reason, dear, or is it too sudden?" "Oh, yes, there is a

reason," she said; and she went to the window and lifted the curtain and looked out, while she spoke, on the consistently beautiful landscape with its uniformity of heat and luxuriant vegetation (everywhere it is the congruousness of Italy that strikes one so), so that Mrs Trafford should not see her face.

"I am very sorry, dear. Perhaps one day you will tell me."

The voice sounded hurt. What greater blow could one inflict on Mrs Trafford than to wound her son? Irma, rendered quick and sensitive to the sounds of woe by sad experience, turned round. Then swiftly she ran to Mrs Trafford and threw herself on her knees before her and buried her face in her lap. "Don't ask me," she said, "don't ask me!" And the ready tears welled up once more.

But neither Harold nor his mother said anything to Father Carlini and the Reverend Matthew. Had they done so things might have turned out differently. As it was, a very strange coincidence occurred which made a still wider breach

between Harold and Irma. Late on the day on which Irma had refused to become his wife, Harold went to Rome to see his client. It had seemed to him that it would be a comfort to the man if things went wrong, to know that his daughter had one at hand on whom she could depend to the fullest extent to which a person can push dependence on another. It had seemed to him, also, that he might draw from the interview some enlightenment as regarded the line she had taken up—which, by-the-by, he had not taken seriously. Also, there were the papers to discuss with him which he had discussed with Irma. The day was very hot, and he elected to start at five in the afternoon. He would dine in Rome, he thought, and return at ten o'clock. There was little pleasure in the prospect of an evening with Irma just now. The Reverend Matthew was to accompany him, and Harold fancied Irma would be happiest alone with his mother. The warder informed him that Mr de Clary had been suffering from malaria for two days, and was asleep.

"I will go and sit with him till he wakes," said Harold; and the Reverend Matthew and he parted at the door. As the key turned in the door the man turned round on his bed, but did not wake. The warder motioned Harold to a chair and left the room, turning the key in the door again as he left. Harold sat down at the window and looked out on Rome—Rome whose eternal endurance resembles the repeated glory of endless sunsets. All the bells were ringing, and round the steeple of a church close by wheeled a flock of pigeons, sometimes rendered invisible by shafts of darkness, sometimes looking white and gilded in the bright rays of a sun that was dying hard and persistent. "It is like a novel," he said to himself, as he glanced backwards now and then at the bed on which the sleeping man turned restlessly. One hairy arm touched the ground almost. The other grasped convulsively the open collar of his night-gear. Something in the arch of the eyebrows reminded Harold of Irma. "Could she have been unfaithful?" he said to himself. "The mother of Irma?"

He tried to fancy what his healthy-minded friends in England would have said could they have seen him in the tiny prison chamber—close to the roofs of Rome. It seemed like a dream, as if he would waken presently and find himself in London—at the Temple, in the Law Courts, or in his cool study.

Suddenly, from a church near, burst forth the chanting of boys' voices. He could not hear the words of the hymn, but the vague music spoke. "I was in prison and Thou visited me" were the words that came to his mind, and as he looked out on the sea of roofs and church spires a great dread came to him, born of loneliness. Oh! would it be said to him, "Forasmuch as thou did'st it unto one of these, thou did'st it unto Me?" He realised that when he was alone it was always thoughts of religion that came to him. The man on the bed began to murmur. He, too, perhaps, had heard the music. Harold turned and held his breath. Face to face with sleep one always feels more or less the reverence,

the pity, that one feels face to face with death. It seemed as if the man fancied he was talking with someone. "Ah!" he sneered, "are you a coward, too?" He sat up in bed. His eyes were open although he still slept. "You have robbed me of what was more than my life. You were my friend. You think I will spare you. You first and myself afterwards." The man sprang from his bed and stared around him wildly, and Harold made a movement forward, then stopped spellbound. For in an instant the man was on his knees struggling as if with an unseen body, and as he struggled, he spoke and swore. Then presently he exclaimed, "Ah!" He drew himself up for an instant, then kneeled again as if to examine the result of his handiwork. "Dead, quite dead," he said, and made rapidly for the door. He shook it violently again and again. But the warder was far away. Instead, it was Harold who laid his hand on his shoulder and shook him. "Wake up, wake up, de Clary!" he said; but the man looked at him with fever-

stricken eyes, and slowly allowed himself to be led back to bed, and a moment later he was sleeping peacefully like a child. Harold touched the bell. He had seen enough. He must be alone for a while. What he had to say to his client would keep now. To the warder, he only said that he must get home. He could come back. It was better not to disturb the prisoner. If he were worse a doctor must be sent for. Harold wanted to be alone with his thoughts. It was clear enough to him now that de Clary had killed the man. It did not strike him as strange that he should have tried to assume innocence. It was the usual way with Criminals. They generally braved it out till it was proved against them, and no doubt Clary thought it his duty for Irma's sake. The question was, could he as a Christian continue to defend a case that he knew was not worthy of his effort? Could he? Was it possible to disassociate the law from religion, and to uphold the man while he was merely frustrating justice and shielding deceit. On the

homeward journey—for he could not stay to dine in Rome—the curate's stilled and conventional remarks irritated him. The day had been very hot, oppressively so. The architecture of Santa Chiara was not so fine as that of San Paolo, but the pictures were decidedly finer. He did not think the Saint Agnes was genuine. Most of all, he annoyed Harold by the way he assumed an intimate knowledge with the ways and phraseology of the priests, with the technical words and expressions of the Roman Church. Why, why, he asked himself, did the Anglican clergy kow-tow to the Roman Church, if it did not believe in it? And all the time he answered in monosyllables, and was conscious that he regretted that he had brought the curate into Rome, albeit his pleasure was so genuine. He was wondering what Irma would say if he dropped the case. How he could possibly ever tell her that her father was guilty. It seemed to him as if after nearly three years of unalloyed peace, a cloak of misfortune had fallen upon him. The one chance he had told

himself of winning Irma would have been if he could have cleared her father. Now, it seemed, indeed, as if the sin of the father rose up, a dark cloud that would overshadow the child's life forever. In an instant he asked himself, why he, who had led such a blameless life, should be beset with such complications? There was only one chance of clearing up the situation, and that was to persuade de Clary himself to tell the truth, to confess his crime. Perhaps never at that moment had Harold longed so to talk the situation over with his mother, but the secret was not his. It was his client's secret revealed to him by an accident. Never, while he still drew breath, would that secret be drawn from him, yet the knowledge of it weighed him down with perplexity.

It was almost a relief when his mother told him that night that Irma was bent on going away, that it seemed to her better to take her to England the next day.

The end of the dream had come: the reality of life, its sadness, its incompleteness, its obfuscation sprang forward to

meet him jibing, as it were, at his want of experience, at his simplicity.

To-morrow! It seemed to him as if to-morrow was to-day, so close it seemed. For one instant it seemed to him as if he could not let her go. Never, perhaps, had he so yearned for sympathy as to-night, and Padre Carlini was quick to notice it, for sympathy in trouble is the great weapon of the Church of Rome—a weapon it has learned to deal with deftly and powerfully, yet lightly, as with the brushing of angels' wings. The English girl was going. The Reverend Matthew, whose visit was almost at an end, had elected to go with them. Harold must stay and see the work out which he had undertaken. To go with them now seemed like persecution. What might not be done with a soul so disquieted and cast down, a heart so discouraged, a noble spirit so broken? The widow had begun the work. It seemed to the priest that the bringing of it to a successful issue lay with him. Only the manliness, the independence of the

Englishman seemed to lie between him and success: Harold would have to be approached by everything that was manly.

There was something almost tragic in the last meal the five had together on the terrace, with the honeysuckle bowing close to them, and the scent of a summer night wafting towards them. The English clergyman alone seemed ignorant of the secret whisperings that hovered around. There was a triumphant look about him, as he recounted the results of his incursions into Bradshaw, which irritated everybody. Mrs Trafford was obviously worried. She longed to be able to comfort her son, and did not know how. And Irma was silent. To her it seemed equally impossible to go or stay. To stay meant to keep an open wound bleeding; to go meant to leave the two beings she loved most in the world. She too, like Harold, yearned to lay the burden of her heart somewhere, and knew not where to lay it. To all comes sometime or other the echo of the Gethsemane; to all comes alike the moment when the soul is alone with its

God. Yet she responded to all that was human in her when Harold asked her to walk up the hill with him.

"Don't refuse him," Mrs Trafford had whispered; "he is so down on his luck." And almost recklessness had invaded her being. To-morrow she was going; might she not be happy for one hour? Mrs Trafford disappeared to attend to packing, and the two priests had, as it were, tacitly agreed to hold their last argument, and Harold and Irma were alone.

Together they went and leaned against the hedge where Mary Fellcroft had leaned with him a few nights before, and once more Harold said passionately to her, "You know, don't you, that whatever happens I love you dearly—that I will stand by you whatever may happen?" He would have liked to have added, "that I will stand by your father in this business."

And she had answered with sobs, "Oh, you do not think me ungrateful, do you?"

And he had replied, "You have nothing

to be grateful for; only, before you go, tell me why you do not love me?"

Then, as she remained silent, he went on, "Oh, little one, if you only knew what you were to me, you would realise that I could bear it better if you would tell me what it is. The very worst of all I could bear," he added, passionately, "if you would tell me what it is that lies between us." And his face looked whiter than could be laid to the account of the blending of the rising of the moon and the dying of the sun. His passion and his love were beyond her comprehension, yet something in it frightened her, frightened her into a wild despair. What was she to do, poor waif, who had no one to guide her?

"Oh, I do love you," she said, "only I can't marry you; and please, please don't ask me why."

And now she was folded close to his breast, and sobbing; and each tear of hers meant joy to Harold. What mattered the future if she loved him! Yet, as he pressed her to tell him what was in

her mind, she grew cold and rigid. Oh, woe for the words unsaid! They are far, far worse than the words that are said, and which can be undone. But to Harold it mattered not: she had said that she loved him, and love to one like him was like the cry of the trumpet of angels. Ah, how he blessed his mother as he pressed Irma close to him, she who had kept his love so pure, had guarded his passions so that no foul shadow came between him and this image of womanhood, which was to him the only one in the world. And as he held her close and watched the sullen obeisance of departing day to the callous moon, his soul cried out to God, blessing Him for his creation. So it is that unsullied life realises the intentions of its Maker. And to Irma it seemed as if somehow things must come right, as if some swift message from somewhere, she knew not whence, would come and clear things up.

Then timidly she drew herself away, and said, "And you will not desert my father?"

And Harold realised that there were yet mountains to be removed. But even now, face to face with the love he had craved, this child of many prayers could not lie. "Irma," he said, and his cry was a passionate appeal although she knew it not, "if I failed to save him, would you still believe in me?"

And a cold chill crept to her heart that was like the tramontana whispering to the hot earth, and horror-struck, she said, "But you do think him innocent, don't you? You know it as I know it; no one can look into his face and doubt it, can they?"

"I will do my best," he said.

And then the two walked back, for he could not bear to hear her question him further; and he pleaded that the night was chilly, and that he must rise early to see her father before she left; and she was so certain that all would be assured of her father's innocence, that she did not notice that he avoided answering her; and she went to sleep, content to think that such a great love was waiting for her even if she

might not take hold of it. What she did not realise was the beauty and holiness of the love that was offered her, for she knew nothing of the passions of men.

Perhaps one day from heaven, looking down, she would know that the love Harold Trafford had offered her was like the love of the angels when they saw that the daughters of the earth were fair, and that the love that had been offered her was something supernatural and passing the ordinary love of men, and altogether to be desired.

CHAPTER XV.

It was all over now—the episode that had seemed to him part and parcel of the beauty of Rome, in keeping with the vineyards and the scent of the lime-trees, with the songs of the peasants and the wax-lit altars—what had struck him for the time as the right of man, the reason for living, the true explanation of life. They were alone now—the priest and he—and all he craved was to be quite alone just for to-night. He had thought it better to say nothing till Irma had left. He had accompanied her to the door of the prison, and when she came weeping away, had comforted her to the best of his ability; but to himself his words had seemed cold and colourless. He did not know that she did not understand their

purport. It had seemed to her treachery leaving her father, and she had been powerless to explain why she went. She had kept from him the story of Harold's devotion. She knew quite well that he could worm it out of her.

"Ah, father! you do not think that I want to leave you, do you?"

And he, glad that she should be at rest with friends, had replied, "No, no, my child, you are right to go."

How could he doubt the love that had clung to him ever since it was born? Yet, as she stood at the door, unable to tear herself away—compelled, as it were, to return again and again to throw herself into his arms—a sort of despair clutched at his heart. She was going, this creature, who believed in him, who loved him. Would they ever meet again? Would she had stayed a little longer! When the door was closed, he threw himself on the bed and sobbed. Little, frail Irma gone—little, frail Irma, who had so often grown so strong and brave when he needed her!

Harold hoped that it would never be his lot again to carry such a message to a fellow-creature; but, after he had seen Irma off at the station, all his nobility, all his uprightness had returned to him. It was no longer the lover who had almost broken down as the train carried off all that was most dear to him in this world. It was at once the Christian and the man of honour that re-entered the cell—the astute, loyal man who yet realised that there was a God above who would not be mocked at. Would de Clary recognise, as he came towards him, that there was something unusual in his manner, that it was to-day, and not in the law courts, that the verdict would be pronounced? Harold had no fear as he entered the cell, although he fully realised the position. Clary was a man whose hands had already been used to murder. He was a man fierce in his desire for freedom. He would know that Harold alone knew his secret. He might threaten him. If he had any arms secreted in the prison, he might kill him. In a hand-to-hand fight

Harold had no fear of who would obtain the mastery. It might be, however, that he did not leave the man's cell alive. He took the precaution of telling the warder to remain close, but beyond that, he had recourse to no means of self-preservation.

Clary had thought out many things, thought out many points that would clearly prove his innocence, but at sight of Harold's face, speech died away together with hope. He waited for Harold to speak, and what he said was almost what he had expected. Many times during the last few days, ever since the warder had told him that Harold had sat by him, he had wondered whether he had betrayed himself. He listened to what Harold had to say, and his demeanour was brave and manly throughout. Harold was glad of this. It was what he would have wished in Irma's father. At the end he remarked, "And you have told this to no one?"

"I have not breathed it to a soul."

"Then nothing is changed. It lies between you and me."

It seemed to Harold as if the man knew already what his answer would be. "I could not go on with the case."

"You are one of those who think it wrong to defend a guilty man? I believe that that is a point that has been settled by no court in any country."

Harold admired the cool, dispassionate way in which the man discussed the situation.

"I take entirely and solely the higher point of view—the religious point of view, if you prefer it. I think that a man who trusts to another man's ingenuity to evade the law, to frustrate justice, to escape punishment, is a coward."

He was about to add that he looked upon the judgment of men as too insignificant to be counted in the balance with the judgment of God, but de Clary interrupted him.

"Even if others share in his disgrace?" said Clary, and he looked sternly at Harold. He had touched the right chord, and it vibrated through Harold's whole being. God grant him grace, he prayed,

to go through with the truth, even if truth meant the breaking of Irma's heart!

"Even then," he said, after a moment's silence.

Then, as if he were still testing the man to the core, probing him to the very last pitch, de Clary said, "I suppose you know there is no expense I would spare, that I have almost unlimited credit in my own country?"

"It is not a question of money," said Harold; "it is a mere question of truth."

The man was silent for a few seconds. "It will never be said that Auguste de Clary was a coward," he said presently, and he stood up as he spoke. "I will plead guilty."

The two men clasped hands, and for a moment neither could speak. Then, as if it had been too much strain, de Clary burst into tears. "Irma, my little Irma," he said.

And Harold was glad to be able to say to him, "I don't know if she told you that I have asked her to marry me?"

A ray of joy came over the man's

face. "When, when?" he asked, almost peremptorily.

"Some days ago, and again last night, after—after I knew."

"God bless you!" said the man. "Had you told me that sooner, I would not have hesitated."

What Harold did not tell him was that she had refused him. Surely, surely it would come right now. "There is no need that she should know." And the prisoner's face was eloquent in its gratitude.

"She believes in me so implicitly," said Irma's father.

"And she is right," said Harold, and once more the two men shook hands. "I need hardly say that I shall stand by you to the end."

Then, after he had left, he retraced his steps. "Of course, de Clary," he said, "if you wish to engage another counsel, you are perfectly at liberty. Your secret is quite safe with me." It was not his business, he said to himself, to betray another man's secret.

"I have made up my mind," said Clary. "You are perfectly right. If you are so good as to go on with the case, I shall instruct no one else."

And so it was settled between them. Irma was to know nothing. When she heard the verdict, she was to be allowed to think that it was the result of the trial. Harold did not anticipate that the punishment would be a very heavy one, given the circumstances of the case. What pained him most, was to think that Irma's mother had been unfaithful. He had hoped she would never know. Clary had evidently acted under heavy provocation. The murder had been committed in the heat of passion.

He felt decidedly happier when he returned to the hotel. Only the loneliness of it struck him. If only he had been engaged to Irma, so that he could pour out the fulness of his heart in a letter to her! But to-night the dark irresponsiveness of the rooms his mother and Irma had occupied struck him with a sense of chill melancholy. The beauty of Rome had

vanished, and the lampless windows seemed to him like an illustration of his soul, darkened and groping. The fire-flies darted hither and thither, and the sheep-dogs of the 'vignerone' barked to the moon as they did every night, only everywhere there seemed emptiness. It was as if the night owl hooted derision, and the silence demanded an account of Irma's absence. What was she thinking of to-night, the dear, little, fragile thing, who had told him she loved him, yet would not marry him? He almost laughed to himself, so sure was he that later on it would all come right, unless she was angry with him when she knew that he had advised her father to confess. Once more the temptation came back to him, fierce, persistent almost, came back in the insinuating garb of compromise. There was yet time to go back and say, "Pass your case on to another and I will be silent." But the temptation was not too strong for Harold Trafford. It held in it all the repulsiveness of untruth, and a character like his would refuse this by instinct — reject,

abhor it. It seemed to him now that the kindest thing he could do, was to tell her himself in the kindest way. God grant that she would not hate him for it!

And now his work seemed cut out for him. Every day he visited de Clary in his prison, encouraging the man, and, without knowing it, imbuing him with his theories—theories that would have seemed madness to anyone else who had not begun to see behind the veil which is opened out by suffering. Gradually de Clary was beginning to understand him, and how two-fold a man increases his misery by kicking against the pricks, by measuring and weighing events by their earthly results, their puny, short-lived effect in this world, instead of merging them into the fathomless acres of eternity. It is man who insists on limiting his possibilities, his goals, his ends. 'The last day' is the day of death to the mind of man when it is indeed only the beginning. Everywhere, everywhere, human beings forgetting that they are but flies on the

wheel, yet flies who will be butterflies one day poising on the sweetest flowers in God's garden! Would the day come when Harold, too, would be unable to see the beyond, to feel that all was for the best? That his short-lived agony of despair mattered not, reckoning that the sufferings of this present world are as nothing to the glories that shall be revealed hereafter?

It was after a day in Rome that the blow fell on Harold which changed his life for him. It fell with all the poignancy a blow can contain which falls on an unaccustomed head, for his life had been even and suave, and it had seemed to him as if great sorrows could not be his, because he had not sought great joys. He had yet to learn that the gods put upon the shoulders of those who can bear, the full burden that is prepared for man, that the willing servant is given no hour of rest—not here, not here. It is to those who idle in the market-place to whom leisure is allowed on earth.

Harold had been all the day nearly

with de Clary, and when he left him, he had wandered, as was his wont, into one of the churches.

"How easy life is, after all," he said once to himself, "if only one takes it as it is sent. How far, far happier de Clary is since the bolt has fallen, since he has made up his mind to face events."

To-day the questions of the Roman faith seemed insignificant face to face with the direct workings of God in men's minds. At the station he had met Carlini, and the conversation between the two had been bright. In two days they were to part, and in two days he would be with Irma, Irma whom he had grown to love yet more passionately since she had left him. There was no evil augury in the evening breeze, no wave of warning in the scented air. The life of Italy stirred lazily, quietly everywhere, as if no rending heart-tearings, no crushing fulminating grief could trouble it.

At the hotel he found a budget of letters, and the one he took up first was his mother's, because it was the one that had

come from the nearest surroundings of Irma. But the very first lines turned his head to dizziness, blinded him. Something seemed to surge to his eyes, to shake his whole being.

"My dear boy," it began, "I hardly know how to tell you. It will be a hard, a cruel blow, but I feel that it is I and no other who must tell you. God knows that I would have spared it you! Even now, as I write, I cannot understand it. Irma came to me to-day and told me that she was going to marry Mr du Pré——"

The letter was a long one, full of tender advice. The love in it spoke almost in his mother's voice to him from the far distance.

"I beg of you, dear one, not to grieve too much," she said, but the rest of the letter meant nothing to him. All he could see, the words that seemed burned into his brain, branded on the very sky (and he rushed out into the air to have more room for his grief), were: "Irma came to me to-day and told me that she was going to marry Mr du Pré!"

CHAPTER XVI.

SAD as she was at leaving her father, lonely as it was to be in a strange country amongst strangers, however kind they were, it yet soothed Irma to be quiet. She had a great task before her, a task beyond her strength. She had to learn to forget Harold; yet at every turn she seemed to meet his mind, to seem to know him better.

Not a day, not an hour hardly without his name rising to Mrs Trafford's lips! In the evenings she would tell Irma, while they worked, stories of his goodness and cleverness as a child, of all her fears for him, of all her hopes, and daily she grew to love Irma more and more, and to her it seemed as if there could only be one solution, one end to the exciting little

drama. It would end like a simple story by her taking Irma to her heart as Harold's wife. How wonderfully well everything was arranged in this world, she said to herself. How clearly she saw the finger of God in all this! If Harold had not gone to Rome, he would never have met Irma. How wonderful were the ways of the Divine! She felt a little sorry for Mary Fellcroft, through whose instrumentality he had gone to Rome. No doubt it was a blow to her; but then, as Mrs Trafford put it in homely phraseology, "Mary Fellcroft had had her day."

And all the time the Reverend Matthew came almost daily, and Mrs Trafford, blinded by her imagination, failed to see the real tragedy that was being enacted beneath her roof. But it was Mary Fellcroft who precipitated events as these strong-minded women do. There are always those in the world who are not fearful of shaping destinies, who do not dread to make or mar the lives of others, if they think that they are doing right, and

in the years to come, blame themselves for their want of ingenuity in managing their own affairs.

On the night that de Clary had decided to follow Harold's advice and confess his crime, Harold had made a confidant of Father Carlini. Men are not one whit less reticent than women, although, perhaps, they choose the recipients of their confidences better sometimes. It had not occurred to him, certainly it would not have seemed to him necessary to enjoin silence. And the priest had written to Mary Fellcroft that Harold was no longer going to try and clear de Clary. It had seemed to Mary Fellcroft quite natural that she should tell Irma, when she saw her, how sorry she was. She had run up to London for two days in September to try on a gown. She was inclined to be very kind now to Irma, as she always was to anybody who followed her advice.

She had taken her out shopping and to a picture-gallery, invited her to stay with her at her father's house in the

country, had given her and Mrs Trafford a dinner at a fashionable restaurant, and, perhaps, with no afterthought, had invited the Reverend Matthew to be one of the party. It was quite late when she was driving the girl home in a hansom, while the curate escorted Mrs Trafford in a four-wheeler, that she said to the girl, "I hope, dear, that you are not angry with Mr Trafford for dropping your father's case. You may be sure that he is right. He looks at things differently, we know, from many people, but you may be sure that he is right." But she was not prepared for the effect on the girl of her ill-considered speech, for the deadly white that overspread her features, the horrific surprise, the gasp for breath, as she asked what Mary Fellcroft meant. The widow was genuinely alarmed at the result of her handiwork.

"Oh, dear child, I ought not to have told you. I thought, of course, that you knew. . . ." Mary Fellcroft stopped the cab and tried to persuade Irma to go into a chemist's.

"I always bring my salts, of course—just to-day."

"Please take me home," and the words sounded as if they were frozen between her teeth.

"My dear, I am so sorry. Of course, I thought you knew," she repeated, aimlessly.

"Please, Lady Fellcroft, tell me everything." The girl's voice held in it almost a command, and for once Mary Fellcroft felt weak and cowed, as she told Irma the contents of Father Carlini's letter. What filled Irma with inward rage was the fact that no one had told her. This plot of silence made her furious with a fury that was like that which had possessed her father when he had killed his wife's lover. What wounded and pained her most of all was that she should have been away from her father at this moment of trial. She must go back to him, she said, to herself; she must go back. Like one in a dream, she looked out on to the busy streets as the hansom sped its onward course—looked and saw neither the traffic nor the running

lamplighters, nor the throng which came and went, nor heard the cry of the newspaper boy.

What did anything matter to-night? He had deserted them—he whom she had trusted more than God, and her father would be condemned. She felt it—knew it. She, too, was beginning to realise that the griefs that paralyse are nothing in this great cauldron of pain; that a woman's broken heart is but like the falling of a leaf from a tree in the eyes of Heaven. The wheel was turning, and the fly would be crushed. The coach would reach its destination all the same.

Mary Fellcroft thanked Heaven that the four-wheeler was not yet in sight. She had no wish to assist at the scene which would probably take place when Mrs Trafford and the curate arrived.

"Are you sure, dear, that I can leave you? That you feel all right? It is later than I thought; but, of course, if you like I will come in with you." She kissed the girl frigidly. Her conscience told her that it would be right to go into the house with

the girl, to stay with her till the others came; but it was Irma who relieved her of the responsibility she so longed to shirk.

"No, please, thank you very much, I would rather be alone."

The door was opened, and the frail, white figure entered the house. Lady Fellcroft leaned forward and kissed her hand to her, but Irma never turned.

The hansom drove off, and notwithstanding the emotions she had gone through, Mary Fellcroft was not without a certain feeling of satisfaction as she leaned back in the cab and drew her cloak around her. She was quite sure that now all was over between them—the two whose alliance of friendship she dreaded so. To herself she merely said, "Now he will be free to follow his bent—the dear quixotic thing."

Had she seen the havoc in Harold's heart the night he received the news of Irma's engagement to the curate, she would have been frightened, have recoiled for ever from interfering with the destiny of others. As she knelt on her *prie-dieu* that night, and told her beads, she told herself that she

had acted quite wisely. That she would have to submit to her motives being misinterpreted, as those of the saints had been before her, she was quite prepared. Somehow, though, to-night her eyes did not seek the agonised figure of the thorn-wounded Christ that was affixed to the wall, with an ivory shell full of holy water beneath it.

It was Mrs Trafford who suffered most that night, because everything about her was genuine—her griefs, her sympathies, her antipathies, her surprises were all real ones, and the thoroughness of her composition gave a solidity to her upheavals that was like the uprooting of oaks. It was rather hard upon her that she should be plunged direct from the commonplaces of the Reverend Matthew into the highly-strung drama that awaited her in the drawing-room. The Reverend Matthew had improved—expanded enormously—since his trip to Italy, since his long talks with Father Carlini, since his association with the beauties of an Italian summer, but he still had the soul of a tourist, and a tourist has not at all the soul of a traveller. They

are two distinct beings. The difference is as great as that between a pilgrim and the owner of a travelling circus. It was merely Anglicanism that came to the Reverend Matthew's aid when he entered Mrs Trafford's drawing-room in response to her invitation that he should finish up the evening with a whisky and soda. This giving of whiskies and sodas to the friends of her son was the one concession she made to the foibles of humanity. It was Harold who had taught her that a whisky and soda is the bond and seal of brotherhood. But both he and Mrs Trafford realised that they were both too essentially British to cope successfully with the grief, the wealth of outburst that awaited them. The room was still unlighted. Irma had begged the maid not to bring the lamps. A faint glow that was but the regret of day struggled still to pierce through the lace curtains, and gave a weird outline to her figure as she stood erect to meet them as they entered. Yet, as they came towards her, she remembered how kind they had been, and that the woman was Harold's

mother, and that Mr du Pré was his friend. She almost reeled into Mrs Trafford's arms, as she cried out, "Why, why did you not tell me? Why did you not tell me? Oh, I want to go back to him. Let me go, let me go."

Perhaps never in his life had the curate so risen to emergencies. He prided himself on understanding humanity, on having felt the pulse of the East End; but face to face with sin, he was apt to be a little severe. Now he found himself face to face with human despair in the garb of purity and beauty. It was far easier to deal with sorrow when there was no sin behind it. It was his duty, clearly his duty, to comfort this poor child.

Later, when Irma was calmer—soothed, at least, into silence by the joint efforts of Mrs Trafford and the curate—she felt sure that Harold had dropped the case because she had refused him. Oh! he could not have deserted him if he had really loved her. To her the inner chambers of the mind of a real Christian had not yet been revealed. How could she, poor simple

child, enter into his theories? Never, never again would she think of him who could desert her father because he was angry with her. And now a feverish desire to get away took possession of her—to leave Mrs Trafford's house before Harold returned. In vain Mrs Trafford pleaded that when she saw him all would be explained. Irma grew stubborn in her misery, and all she realised clearly was that in all the whole wide world she had no one on earth to turn to but her father, and that she would die if she was not allowed to go back to him. And then the Reverend Matthew, knowing nothing of what had passed between them, or loyalty to Harold would have forbidden his speaking, came to her and told her that he loved her, and asked permission to protect her through life, and from very despair she had accepted him. It seemed the only way out to her who stood in such sore need of love.

But the clouds were not darker that massed around Irma, than those that gathered in the fulness of their preg-

nance of misery around Harold, only two days before the moment when he would see her face to face. How he had longed for those two days to be over, none would ever know on this side of the tomb. Still less would anyone ever realise what his mother's letter had meant to him when he read, "Irma has just been to me and told me that she is engaged to Mr du Pré."

CHAPTER XVII.

In after years Harold could never think without a recoil of horror of the feelings that had arisen in him when he learned the news. Had a lamb suddenly taken to roaring like a lion, the sound would not have been more unwonted than were the thunder-rolls of dismay that crashed and fulminated in his mind. What was the good, he asked himself, of his having led a life such as his had been, if the very first time he arrived at happiness she eluded and scoffed at him? For one instant there rose up in his mind the many insidious arguments he had read that went to prove the impossibility of the existence of a God. If there were one, then He was cruel, unjust. With Schopenhauer for one instant he exclaimed, "If God made the

world, then I should be sorry to be God!" What right—what right had God to create human beings simply for an inheritance of pain? For one instant he resolved with a hard, firm resolve that was like ice, but which, like ice, would feign be obliged to break, to live as other men did. He had been sneered at enough for his immaculate life. Was it then to mock at him that God had allowed him to come all this way, to reach a landing-place after nearly thirty years, on which he found neither rest nor rejoicing, nor guerdon of any sort for his straight-living? Was it so that men would be derided after death, derided for leading an expectant life, for looking for things that were not to come? The whole surroundment of the episode was cruel. Why had he been led to meet the girl? Why had he sacrificed himself for the father instead of going back with her? He cursed himself for not having confided in the Reverend Matthew. Everything seemed to have been wrongly managed, and as he walked up and down the edge of the mountain, where he had stood with

Mary Fellcroft, he repeated to himself, "There is no God, there is no God, and man is a fool not to get all the good out of life that he can."

It was much later that he felt able to open his other letters. One was from Vi Spicer. "I feel I must write to you," she said, "for I am so miserable. I feel like killing myself. I've been, oh! so good since you talked to me; but there, what's the use of being good? It's just the wicked have a good time, and I don't believe there's no God at all anywhere. Perhaps if you was to write to me I should feel better; but there, I expect you think it's like my cheek to ask you. I saw him in the street once, but he didn't look my way. I expect he saw me though. He was walking with her. Oh! I felt—— There, I won't write about it. Hoping you are well—Yours sincerely, Vi."

In after years Harold realised that it was that letter that had saved him. The companionship of misfortune seemed to soothe him. The very fierceness of temptation the letter presented brought with it, or

was succeeded by, a reaction that brought peace and a relaxing of the nerves that was like a summer rain after a thunder-storm on an intolerably hot day. His first instinct had been to sit down and write to her from the fulness of his own bitterness: "You are right, there is no God. Be happy in your own way; get what you can out of this miserable existence, for there is no other." Almost he could have added, "Let us fly away somewhere together and comfort each other for having been brought into existence, cheat each other into believing that we are happy." All the manhood in him cried out to-day for its rights. He remembered Vi Spicer, with her glorious starry eyes and the crown of golden hair about her head. "Such a woman as that would be true," he said to himself—"true, at least, during the short span of man's existence." Such truth, such fidelity was the only one that mattered—for aught he knew or believed to-night, the only one that existed. He had taken up a pen and paper to write a passionate outburst to the girl whose life depended on love, and who would under-

stand it. Had his mother seen him that night, she would have crouched away with terror before the image of the ghost—the ghost unconcealed, unfettered, which at last stretched out its arms and had no shame. Then he threw down his pen. Something that was perhaps in answer to his mother's prayers sprang forward in his heart. The custom of years held his hand in check, prevented the unworthy expression of the thoughts that had washed over him.

"Pah! To be so upset by a jilt!" he said to himself; but as he said the word his heart smote him. No; Irma was no jilt in heart or action. From the first she had told him that it could not be; yet he knew, he knew that she loved him. He would write to her, pour out his heart in letters of blood. She had done this thing because he had dropped her father's case, someone had told her. This was clear from his mother's letter. In a postscript his mother said, "Is it true that you have given up the defence of Mr de Clary? Irma seems to have learned something

about it, but I expect you would have told me."

Yes; this explained it. She fancied that he had deserted them; but as he took up his pen again, he remembered that she was the affianced of another, of his friend, of Matthew du Pré. His friend, yes; but as a husband for Irma no man could have seemed to him more undesirable. Once more a rage of mixed feelings entered his mind. He could not bear the room, the letters, the stifling atmosphere of the night; he rushed out on to the road, and wandered up the hill. Standing on the edge of it, where he and Mary Fellcroft had stood together, stood the priest looking out on to the moonlit silence. It was as if Rome were holding out her arms to him. From the very depths of his despair he confided in Father Carlini, confided in him, too, the doubts that had assailed him, that were still assailing him. As the priest looked across the hills, as if searching for comfortable words, he realised that his day had come, that Mary Fellcroft had done her work

well, that this was the moment he had been waiting for all these weeks. Once more he recognised the power of the spirit working silently in the bosom of the Church. He felt sorry, very sorry for the man he had grown to like more than he could ever have imagined that he could care for a heretic and an Englishman. He smiled to himself at the easy success of the feeble curate; but what mattered the heart of a maiden as compared with the winning of a soul to Rome? It was as if he were receiving a confession, and for the first time it struck Harold what an intense relief this outpouring of his mind had been, how wonderfully confession must meet the exigency of an overburdened heart; while the priest realised that in the form of the absolution and comfort he gave, would lie the whole structure of Harold's future.

"Ah! my son," he said, "there is nothing unusual in what you are perhaps going through. It is almost, if I may say so without blasphemy, a form of the Holy Spirit's working in you,—this leaving you

to the attacks of the evil one, that you may be sifted, tested, sanctified, purified by temptation. So was Christ left to the temptation of Satan. It is only to strong characters like yourself that such temptations come. It is the big mountain that is shaken by earthquakes; the weak are swallowed up because they are useless, or left to slide unmolested through life like tiny hidden streams. Ah! my son, it is in moments like these that one feels the necessity of a God."

"To-night everything seems untrue," said Harold. "All the Bible seems to me a clouded tale, the outcome of man's fogged imagination. After all, what proof is there, what proof? Nothing but Nature, which men pretend to explain away by science."

"Ah! that is the power of tradition; that is where our Church comes in," said the priest, and he realised that this was the most triumphant moment of his life. "The power of a tradition handed down from lips to lips has twice the force of a written one. Remember that the fathers spoke to the apostles—were close, as it were, to the

original meaning, before it was translated by man's ignorant interpretation, and corrupted by man's devisings for his own ends."

"Then you have no doubt—forgive me, I am not speaking to you as a priest—you have no doubt that there was a Christ?"

"If I wished to doubt, I could not," replied the priest, with such swift certainty as left no doubt in his mind. "The Bible—the whole history of Christ—might be an impudent forgery, but the testimony of hundreds of men who knew personally those who were with our Lord on earth,—that cannot be disbelieved. The whole key to the Bible lies in the writings of the fathers. You have it in your own Bible: 'Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you,'" says St Matthew.

Mary Fellcroft had chosen well the priest that was to convert Harold.

Long the two men talked together, and Father Carlini put forth all that was best in himself. He was not as a rule a spiritually-inspired man. His religion had been more

practical than mystic. He was fond of assuming the airs of a man of the world; but to-night it seemed to him as if Harold's soul were laid bare, were being offered to him, and that to reject it would be a sin. Alone out there in the moonlight, the two men spoke as it is given to few men to speak to each other in this world, and as they returned to the hotel, there was something chastened and almost glorified in their faces, as if they shone from the reflected glory of some divine vision; and although Harold did not know it, all that night the priest knelt and prayed for the soul of the man who had come to him in his trouble.

A few weeks later Harold was baptised into the Roman Church, and Mary Fellcroft felt that she had indeed acted wisely, and Harold wrote to Vi Spicer a letter urging her to good living, talking of the beauty of suffering, pointing out the glories of sacrifice, assuring her of the existence of a God All-powerful and a pitying Christ, promising to come and see her, and enclosing a five-pound note which did a great

deal towards emphasising his words. But it never occurred to him to write to Mary Fellcroft. Somehow he shrank from her comments and from her triumph.

To his mother the news of his conversion came as the greatest blow and grief she had ever suffered. There could be no doubt at all about the ghost now. It stood clear and gaunt against the dark background of the future—evident even in the daylight, visible to the whole world—as it seemed to her, almost like the image of Death. But her letters to him were kind and tolerant, circumspect and guarded as her letters to him always were. There was no reproach in them, only pain. She only shook her head when he wrote once more:

"MY DEAR MOTHER,—You greatly exaggerate the difference of the two doctrines. You make too much of form and trivial details which do not affect the whole. I am not going to give up the Bible as you seem to fear, only I know now that I shall only understand it for the first time. Read the twenty-second chapter of St Matthew's Gospel and Christ's own words to the multi-

tude: 'The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat, all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do, but do not ye after their works, for they say and do not.' I am more convinced daily," he continued, "that the priest and the man have nothing whatsoever to do with each other; and if a priest were not a good man, still, so long as he taught the doctrines rightly, his word would still have effect because of the united power of the Church."

To this she had answered, telling him to read the seventh of St Mark. "I fear, my dear son," she said, "that you are only misled by those who teach for doctrines the commandments of men."

It was the Reverend Matthew who seemed the least surprised. From the summit of the tabernacle of human joy Fate had built up for him, he could afford to be tolerant. "I cannot help thinking that you would have found comfort in the bosom of one of the more advanced Anglican Churches," was his mild remonstrance. "There are so many in which

the ceremonial is almost identical with that of the Church of Rome, yet without the superstitions which, to my mind, are almost idolatrous."

To this Harold's answer was almost a retort. "My dear du Pré," he said, "I can't agree with you. Just what I object to is that the Anglican Church has adopted only the ceremonial, without apparently any reason for it or any conviction. If incense, genuflexions, images, fastings, penances, confession come to the Anglican Church from Rome, then the Anglican Church must believe in the traditions of Rome. It is impossible to believe that it accepts the tradition for ceremonial and not for doctrine, since the ceremonial and the doctrine come from the same source. To my mind, looking at things as I now do, I look upon the introductions into the Anglican Church of several of the teachings and ceremonials of the Roman Church as merely an attempt to pander to the artistic and mystic temperament of human beings. There is no reason for it, but I am not

a whit the less imbued than I was before my conversion, with the theory I have always confided to you that there is yet another Church to come that will be the real Church of Christ on earth, and which is neither the one nor the other." (It was well that Father Carlini did not see these letters.) "It is impossible, of course, to imagine that, in the absence of Christ's bodily presence, such a state of things can exist as existed when He was on earth. The children of the bridegroom fast because the bridegroom is no longer with them, but somewhere a Church must presently exist that has discipline without superstition, ceremonial without idolatry." He tried to bring himself to congratulate his friend on his engagement, but could not.

Mary Fellcroft wrote: "I think I need not express to you my joy, principally because you will at last know what real religious peace is." The hidden "I told you so" contained in the letter irritated him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BUT September was nearly at an end. Leaves lay mournfully strewn across the paths and swards of the parks, and now and then were blown in great loose sheaves across the street, while the poor were already beginning to wonder how they were going to get coal this year. Sadness, which was in keeping with that of the autumn, had fallen upon Mrs Trafford's happy little home. It seemed as if her son's soul and heart had been filched from her, and that she had been deprived of a newly-found daughter. The relations between herself and Irma were strained, and she took little or no interest in the approaching wedding, nor, for the matter of that, did Irma. In her perplexity she had accepted du Pré as the only way of solving the problem. It had seemed

to her that, as his affianced bride, it would be easier to meet Harold. It would, as it were, sweep her out of his life. Of his pain, his grief, his disappointment she never thought, for it seemed to her impossible that he could really care for such an insignificant person as herself. In vain Mrs Trafford pleaded that he was broken-hearted, that he was miserable, that she was the wife for him. She was obstinate to steeliness. With blanched face and set lips she would listen to all Mrs Trafford had to say, and then answer. "One day, when he is a great man, you will be glad that I would not marry him," she would say, with a smile that was more like an expression of pain; and Mrs Trafford was beginning to lose patience with her. And now everyone nerved themselves for a rather trying ordeal—namely, Harold's return. He himself was impatient to return, if only to test his own feelings. He felt sure that Irma needed protection. He could imagine how his mother would be unkind to her without knowing or realising

that she was so. He knew well how transparent her resentments were, how strongly she would feel Irma's having refused to marry him.

To Mrs Trafford it seemed as if even if the girl had not cared for him, she should have married him from gratitude. But not to care for such a man!—that was what Mrs Trafford could not understand. In those days Mary Fellcroft was very kind to Irma. It seemed to her as if this made up for many things. She came to London purposely to help her with the trousseau, and more than once lost her temper with her in a well-bred way.

"Why, my dear child, there is not a girl in London who would not give her eyes to be able to spend what you are spending on your clothes. I know I wish I could."

"I wish you would spend it instead of me," the girl had replied, listlessly; and then Lady Fellcroft had suddenly become nervous at her own act. She had been right, quite right, she said to herself, to

prevent her marrying Harold; but was it quite, quite right to allow this desolate being to marry a man she did not care for? Some hidden gleam of missing motherhood flashed for an instant in her heart, and she seized her opportunity. The wedding-dress had just been tried on, and the maid had left the room to see the dressmaker downstairs. Mary Fellcroft was turning over Brussels lace on the bed, when suddenly she caught the sound of a sob.

"Oh, I can't! I can't!" the girl had moaned, and Lady Fellcroft was terrified at her expression—the expression of rage and misery and revolt which was like her father's, and which so changed the look of the girl. "It won't be all roses for Mr du Pré," Lady Fellcroft said to herself, but she took the girl in her arms. "Irma," she said, firmly, "isn't it wrong of you to marry this man if you don't care for him?"

But she was not prepared for the girl's outburst. "It is your fault, your fault," she cried, passionately. "Why couldn't

you leave me alone?" And great tears came now to clear the anger-storm.

"You don't know what you are saying," replied Lady Fellcroft, coldly. She knew that the least indication of weakness on her part would be fatal. "I merely advised you, told you what I would do in your place. I knew that his whole heart and soul were wrapped up in the religious question. His going over to Rome has proved it. But if you think that he cares for you——"

The girl turned her face away. Never, never would she tell Mary Fellcroft of this sacred passage in her life, of the moment when the heart of Harold had been laid at her feet. Mary Fellcroft grew anxious at her silence. Had he cared for Irma? She had tried to cheat herself into the belief that he had only noticed the girl from pity, that in his great tenderness, in his quixotic chivalry, he was capable of marrying her almost from a sense of obligation. But if she were wrong? Once again she doubted for an instant her power of shaping destinies.

Very gently, but with intense anxiety in her voice, Mary Fellcroft asked: "Has he ever said anything to you to lead you to believe that he cares for you?"

"Oh, don't ask me, don't ask me, don't speak of it," said the girl, impatiently, fiercely almost, and Mary Fellcroft preferred to think that she had been right, that the girl had only fancied and hoped, and that her fancies and hopes were wrong; but to salve her conscience she said: "I think I shall speak to Mr Trafford myself about it all. He, at least, will persuade you that it is wrong to marry a man you do not care for."

"I forbid you, I forbid you to do it. Why should I be treated like a helpless child? I can manage my own affairs. For God's sake, don't interfere with me again." The bitterness of the cry took off from the rudeness of the remark.

Lady Fellcroft tried to disguise her satisfaction by a hurt expression. "Oh, of course if you don't wish it," she said, shrugging her shoulders a very little.

And now she grew feverishly anxious

for the wedding to take place. Harold had returned, and there was no knowing what might not occur. She had even suggested to Irma that if she liked it better, she would take her to an hotel, and she could be married from there. The idea had appealed to Irma, and Mrs Trafford had been glad at the suggestion. It was Harold who interfered. "I will not hear of it," he said to his mother, and she knew that when he spoke like that he meant it.

"You are my little ward," he had said to Irma, with the paternal manner he had adopted towards her, and which had in it just a shade of sadness. And then, one evening, he had taken her out into the park very much against her will, but he wouldn't risk saying what he had to say in the small house where at any moment they might be disturbed. They sat down in a sheltered corner, but all the melancholy of autumn was spread about them, and now and then both detected a chilliness in the air which, had they not been so seriously engrossed in conversation,

would, in ordinary circumstances, have made them rise from their seats and walk on. He had pleaded that he had to talk over business with her. Clary had begged him to take over the matter of her settlements, the arrangement of her affairs. Grand tribute this to the character of the man he had met by accident in an hotel! It had been a cause of wonder and dismay to Clary when he had learned, first from Irma, then from Harold, that Irma was going to marry du Pré. There had been almost an apology in his voice as he said to Harold, "I am dreadfully sorry, but she is such a child, she does not understand you. If I had been with her——"

Never had the weight of his imprisonment chafed him so; he could have beaten down the walls of his prison at the realisation of his impotence. He had begged his daughter to come and see him first before she took this step, but she knew what he would say, and feared to hear it. Nothing but the course of almost sullen obstinacy she had embarked upon could help her to keep her resolution, to go on

to the end, and she wrote and said: "We start for Italy on our wedding day; we shall be with you very soon. It is better so."

Then he had written to her a letter full of firm tenderness. "I forbid you," he said, "to ruin your life because you fancy this man has deserted me. He has not done so; he and I are quite one in the course he has mapped out. He is perfectly right; he has made a new man of me. If you care for me," ended the letter, "you will marry no one till we have talked it over together."

This letter was the hardest obstacle to overcome. For one instant it seemed to her that it was her duty to obey the voice she had obeyed implicitly and willingly for over eighteen years. Then the voice of Lady Fellcroft came back to her, the clear incisive words, "You are not the sort of girl to let a man make a fool of himself out of pity." Out of pity! All the pride of many races was in her heart—pride mingled with the longing to do the most, at the cost of any sacrifice, for the man who had been

so good to her. And she had written: "Believe me, dear father, I am perfectly happy; I am acting of my own free will. I don't think he ought to have given up your case, but that has not influenced me."

And now she felt that it was necessary to keep up the same iron obstinacy as she sat side by side with him in the park. All she prayed was that he would not plead his affection, for then, indeed, she would break down. She must surround herself to the end with this stony halo of reserve—to the end. And what then? Afterwards? She did not ask herself what would happen then, she did not realise that she was sacrificing the life of Matthew du Pré; while he, infatuated, proud, indiscriminating, saw nothing in the ominous quiet of her demeanour. And now, as she sat by Harold's side, all the sadness of it came over her, and once more a rapid revolt against Mary Fellcroft rose to her heart, to be quickly dispelled at the quiet calm of his words.

"Irma," he said, for never again could he call her Miss de Clary, "I wanted to have a

short talk with you——" He paused. It was difficult to go on, and she made it harder by her unresponsiveness. "You are and always will be very dear to me." Her lip quivered, and she changed her position. "I want you to look upon me as your friend. Whatever happens, I want you to know that the fact of your having preferred someone else does not in any way change the interest I take in you. You are my little sister," he went on, almost wistfully. "You may need a friend, and I want you to promise that whatever happens, wherever you are, if you need a friend you will turn to me. Your father will, I believe, be set free. If he isn't, his punishment will be short, I think, and light. Whatever it is, he will bear it like a man; but you may be parted from him, you may want a friend. Remember that as long as I live you can count on me."

The hot tears welled to her eyes. As he paused she murmured faintly, "How good you are!" but the words sounded woefully weak.

Then Harold got up from his seat and

walked up and down the leaf-strewn pathway with his arms behind him. He was growing agitated at his own thoughts. In a few seconds he came and stood before her. "Irma," he said, impetuously, "are you sure that you are acting of your own free will? Are you fond enough of du Pré? Do you know what it is to spend a lifetime chained to one you do not care for? Tell me, tell me, is there any secret? Is there anything I could put straight? For God's sake, tell me. Don't be afraid. Even now, at the last moment, don't, I beseech you, mar your life. You are so alone," he said. Almost he could have added, "Why can't you let me protect you instead of him?"

For one instant it seemed to Irma as if she must cry out, must there, in the open London park, with the foot-passengers coming and going, throw herself into the sheltering arms of the man she loved, break down the hideous barrier she had created around her, placed between herself and happiness; but it was too late, too late. She could not face the commotion and stir

it would bring about, the whole wonder of it all, the reproachful face of her affianced husband—above all, the scorn of Mary Fellcroft. No, she realised it now, never while Mary lived could she look upon Harold as wholly hers. He had gone over to her faith; it was her influence that was paramount with him. It was only from pity, only from pity that he pretended to love her.

She smiled a piteous smile as she said, "I feel sure that I shall be very happy with Mr du Pré." For the life of her she could not have called him by his name; and Harold looked at his watch and said, in a voice he tried to make cheerful, "Now we have had our little chat, we had better be going home." And on the way they talked only of money matters.

CHAPTER XIX.

It was over now the day he had so dreaded. The wedding had been a very quiet affair. It had been Irma's wish, and under the circumstances it certainly seemed the best thing. The only bridesmaids were two little nieces of the Reverend Matthew whom the bride had never met. The few guests were all relations of du Pré's. Harold had given her away. It had been the bitterest moment of his life. There had been no breakfast, no drinking of the bride's health. Once, when she said the words "I will," she had turned so white that Harold had stepped forward, but she had steadied herself and gone bravely through to the end. Like one in a dream she had kissed Mrs Trafford and shaken hands with Harold,

responded "Thank you very much" in her pretty, half-foreign accent to the good wishes of the few guests, submitted to the rather effusive and badly disguised, triumphant farewells of Mary Fellcroft. It was only when she kissed Harold's mother that the latter detected a sob breaking from the young bosom that pressed against her in a passionate embrace. "Forgive me," she whispered. "God bless you!" said the mother of Harold, and her lips trembled as she spoke, for at that moment she saw the whole story as if it were written before her, now that it was too late.

And now at last they have driven off in Mrs Lister's carriage, and Lady Fellcroft, feeling a little shy, a little guilty, has also bidden farewell. She wonders how much the ceremony has affected Harold—whether, after all, he cares. She seeks him in the little crowd which seemed greater than it really was in the tiny rooms. But he is gone. Where? she wonders. To see them off at the station? No; he has gone out into the

open air, started off without knowing where he was going to, merely to get away from the little house which to him had become almost a shrine since it had contained Irma. How could he bear it? how could he bear it? he asked himself. Had he not been a man, he would have cried in his mother's arms. He yearned for sympathy, for some one to whom he could show the deep wound of his heart. Little Irma gone—gone, and with such a man as du Pré! On and on he walked, and at last he became conscious that his thirst to be away from the heart of the town had led him out on to the Embankment. The crimson sun was setting in that sullen, ominous, threatening way in which it sets in the autumn. A cold grey was already enveloping the Thames. Swiftly he walked in the direction of Battersea Bridge. Then suddenly he remembered Vi Spicer. Some instinct prompted him to go and see her. For the first time he realised what she must have suffered when Charlie Joyce married. She would understand, she who was acquainted with the love and the

passions of men. In all the world this woman alone understood his sufferings, and the great brotherhood of pain appeared to him for the first time in its full meaning and purpose. To Vi Spicer it seemed that he had come to comfort and cheer her, but it was for himself. He could have knelt before her and buried his face in her knees, and cried. To him the question of her past life was nothing as compared to the love she had given the man who had left her. Once more there seemed to glimmer before his eyes a sort of revelation, a sort of flashing crosswise of the divine law as compared with the earthly—the great band of those who seemed to err and did not, the still larger army of those who have not been found out, yet who have stooped to the lowest depths of moral degradation, and risen again, unsullied, to take their place amongst their fellows unabashed.

"You have come to see how I'm behaving, I suppose?" were the words on Vi Spicer's lips, but she checked them at sight of his face. "Lor', you do look bad!

Whatever is it? Have you had that foreign fever?"

The genuine note of concern seemed to him the sincerest thing he had heard lately, and then he sat and told her the whole story.

"Perhaps you didn't think me sympathetic enough before," he said, "but now I can understand, . . . I do feel so sorry for you, more now than I did then." Yes, he understood now that to understand sin and sorrow and the fulness of joy, one must stand on the same level as one's neighbour. Unfortunately we all stand at different heights.

"You seemed awfully kind," she said. "If it hadn't been for that——" She broke off. It seemed to her difficult to explain that she had been leading a better life. Then suddenly she said, "And don't you feel bad now, and as if there were no God at all, and it just didn't matter what you did, it would all be the same, and you might as well be happy?"

Harold remembered what he had gone through the night her letter had reached

him, and how near he had been to writing to her, "There is no God, let us be happy." A quick wave of shame rose to his face. "I did feel that just for a short time," he said, drearily; "and then, I don't know, it seemed to me as if something revealed itself to me that I could not define. Something told me it would be unmanly."

"Now, that's a sort of feeling comes to you. No parson nor nothing could put that sort of feeling in your head." Ungrammatically as she expressed it, Harold recognised once more the rough philosophy that had struck him so often before. Dimly she echoed the thoughts that had struck him. Was not that the real teaching of God sent to man privately, whispered to each soul separately? Why, oh, why could he find no definite road, no solution to the dark problems that came and went daily in his mind like flitting shadows? He realised now, as he sat with Vi Spicer, that the doctrines of Rome had not hushed the questioning voices of his mind.

"One must just look straight ahead."

"Just like Nina Gillet does on the tight rope at the 'Luminous,'" said Vi Spicer, and Harold could not help laughing at her simile. Then Vi Spicer went on: "But don't you hate them all for behaving so to you? Nasty, ungrateful girl she must be, I should think; and yet, you know, I shouldn't wonder if someone was at the bottom of it all. It sounds like it to me from what you've told me." Then, perfectly naturally, she ended, "I can't understand anyone not wanting to marry you."

Harold laughed again. Then he said, musingly, "But she was always with my mother, and it was her dearest wish."

Vi Spicer looked very wise. "I shouldn't wonder if it was that Lady Fellcroft; she tried it on with me, you know." Vi Spicer nodded her head sagaciously. "She said one day"—here Vi mimicked Lady Fellcroft's voice and manner to perfection—"'I hope, Miss Spicer, that you will not be so foolish as to keep up a correspondence with Mr Trafford; he is not a friend of

yours, and it would be most unwise.'" Then, relapsing into her own form of speech, "But I was too fly for that; I wasn't going to make no promises. 'Mr Trafford's been a very good friend to me,' I said, and she looked just fit to eat me."

As she spoke, Harold grew absent. Could it be? Could it be that Mary Fellcroft had interfered? The thought made him more miserable than ever. What if Irma had cared for him all the time? What could Mary Fellcroft have said? But what did it all matter now? It was too late, too late. She was married to Matthew du Pré. Nevertheless, it occurred to him that he would go back by Mary Fellcroft's house and find out. It seemed to him that he could not rest till he knew, yet that to know would be worse than death. "I will come again," he said to Vi Spicer. Then, suddenly remembering, he said, "How can I thank you for doing as I asked you?"

"It's the music saved me," she said. "When you sent me that fiver I was feeling just about as bad as I could. There,

you just saved me. I went and got some music lessons, and now I expect I shall get some engagement at some hall or other before long."

It soothed Harold to think he had done some good. Then, as he stepped out again into the darkening autumn evening, his heart sank once more. How could he go back to the house where she had been, where every chair, every table, every corner reminded him of her? It seemed to him as if the night in his heart were growing denser every moment. He must pull himself together. There were only two courses open to him—to create some great interest for himself, to throw himself into some gigantic work, or to sink to despair. To despair seemed to him base and unmanly. Yet again he thought of little Irma speeding to Rome with Matthew du Pré—Matthew, the man of great aspirations, of good intentions, of deplorable failures. Once more there came to him the swift, certain conviction that the Rev. Matthew could not have borne such grief as his, that only to the

strong come fierce trials; and as he thought, he asked himself whence came the thought, and Vi Spicer's words came back to him: "That's what no parson could put into your head."

Mary Fellcroft was not at home. After the wedding, she, too, had felt the necessity of distraction to chase the thoughts that had arisen. She had first paid visits and then gone to the oratory. Something in Harold's sudden disappearance had alarmed her. She had fancied he would seek her out. Mrs Trafford, too, had helped to upset her, for when all the guests had gone, and Lady Fellcroft still lingered, hoping Harold would return, she had subsided wearily into a chair and said:

"I don't like the marriage at all, Lady Fellcroft. No, no! . . . I don't mean on Harold's account—poor, dear boy! it is harder for him than we either of us know—but on account of her. There was something in the way she kissed me when she left that makes me anxious about her." Then, almost severely, she added, "I'd

give something to know if there is anything at the bottom of it all. I never could understand her refusing Harold, and I never shall." For once Mary Fellcroft forbore to answer.

It was Mrs Lister who received him, and she meant no malice when she said, laughing, "So Mary's got her way; she's married her off. I thought she wouldn't let you marry her if she could help it." Then, as she saw the expression on Harold's face, she pulled herself up, although, to herself, she said that if the man was such a poor creature as to let Mary Fellcroft manage his life for him, he deserved all he got. But Harold was not to be put off.

"Do you mean it, Mrs Lister?" he said. "Do you think Lady Fellcroft influenced her at all?"

Mrs Lister hesitated. Then she remembered one or two nasty ones she owed Mary. She had always thought it very mean of Mary, who had had a husband, to spoil this girl's marriage. She had gathered a good deal of the

story from her husband and from Mrs Trafford. It had seemed to her that they must all be blind not to see that Mary just wanted him for herself, and she was never very reticent. "Oh, I don't know much"—she was growing a little alarmed at his expression. "We've only just come up to town. I only know that Mary has always said it would be a thousand pities if you were to marry a silly little girl like that, whom no one knew anything about. . . ."

As she spoke, the servant brought in the lamps, and she asked him if he would have a cup of tea. At that instant there was a sound of horses' hoofs beneath the window. Mary Fellcroft had returned. In another moment she stood in the drawing-room, and Mrs Lister, scenting trouble, left them alone together.

"It serves her right," she said to herself; but, all the same, she was rather nervous of what her husband would say. He had been the only one who had approved of Irma's marriage.

He had laughed when he said to his

wife on his return from the wedding, "So John the Baptist is still in the market; he's escaped the siren, gone into the wilderness alone, left Delilah behind."

And Mrs Lister had answered, "I suppose he'll marry Mary after all." But now, after seeing the expression on his face, she felt quite, quite certain that he would never marry Mary Fellcroft. She wished now she had not spoken.

It was Mary Fellcroft who felt the most nervous as she entered, all rustling silks and laces, and with that well-bred, composed air which never deserted her, and which Mrs Lister had nicknamed 'Pontifical.' Harold stood with his back to the light wood fire, which had already become almost a necessity in the evening, and which Mrs Lister had lit nine months of the year, principally because its brightness suited her temperament. Several lamps glowed dimly beneath the shades of artistic coloured silks, and the firelight lit up the silver tea things; all the rest of the room looked dark. She could not see his eyes, and yet something prevented her

sitting down. She unfastened her cloak and threw it back a little, but his voice frightened her as he said, "Lady Fellcroft, forgive me if I ask you a question rather unceremoniously, but may I beg of you not to refuse to answer me. Did you pre— did you ever influence Ir— Miss de Clary in her relations towards me?"

Mary Fellcroft was silent. Her knees trembled; her voice failed her; the room swam round. It had come—the day of reckoning—and she felt like a vile, weak thing in the presence of this young man whose mind she had affected to train. "Influence? How could I influence her?" she laughed, a little hysterically. For one moment she meant to add, "I did not know you cared for her"; but face to face with him it seemed impossible to tell this lie.

"Lady Fellcroft, I must insist on an answer. Did you ever advise her not to marry me?" She was reminded of his profession by the way he spoke. He looked as he must look, she thought, in

the law courts cross-examining witnesses. He would despise her more still, she knew, than he did now, if she did not own the truth.

"I certainly told her that I thought it would be a pity for you to marry a woman who would not assist you in your career—who—who was not ready to sacrifice herself entirely to your future, to——" Here she broke off, for it struck her suddenly that she was giving herself away. "I had no ulterior motive," she went on, hurriedly. "I was sure that you pitied her, that you considered it your duty——"

Here Harold gave a short, hoarse laugh.

"After all," Lady Fellcroft went on, in a hurt tone, "if you cared for her, you had only to tell her so."

"I did," he replied, with quiet dignity. "She knew it."

"Then, if she cared for you——" began the widow.

"Please, Lady Fellcroft," interrupted Harold, and his voice was trenchantly severe.

"Well, of course, I'm very sorry I ever said anything; one ought never to meddle in other people's affairs, but I knew your character so well. I knew how likely you would be to sacrifice yourself if you thought it right."

For the first time Harold perceived that Mary Fellcroft was fond of him. The discovery gave him no pleasure, did not even flatter him. "You have ruined both our lives," he said, and then he made a movement to go.

"Oh, don't go like that!" she exclaimed. "Don't go without hearing how miserable I am, without saying you have forgiven me!"

"I will try to," he said, and left the room without shaking hands, without looking at her; and Mary Fellcroft went upstairs and locked herself into her room, and for the first time for many months shed tears.

This was what happened on Irma's bridal night to those she had left behind.

CHAPTER XX.

Two years have passed, two years during which Harold has striven manfully to forget, for only forgetfulness is real forgiveness—two years since he had left Mary Fellcroft's presence with a raging hate against her in his heart, a revolt that was almost blasphemy against God rending his very soul. He had wandered about till midnight, fighting with himself, wrestling with the demons that possessed him, as he remembered that this was Irma's bridal night, and that she loved him. Then he had remembered his poor old mother, and returned to his home.

A few weeks later the little house was let, and he and his mother were on their way to Rome. He had realised that night that if he did not throw himself into some

all-absorbing work he would be lost, and to him there seemed nothing that so absorbed every fibre of the moral being as the Roman priesthood. "Either there is no God at all," he said to his mother, "or it must mean a man's whole life. A man cannot carry on an existence of his own apart from it, throwing occasional bones to it to keep it from starving, to keep it quiet as it were, to prevent its deserting one."

In vain she pleaded that if he wished to lead a life devoted to Christ he could be an Anglican priest, become a preacher, a missionary. He shook his head. "It was only the Church of Rome," he said, "which understood making of religion at once a science and a profession, and yet mingles with it the spiritual cravings of the inner consciousness."

For one instant Mrs Trafford had revolted. After all these years was she to be deserted in her old age? Was this religion to leave the widowed mother, who had devoted her life to him, just when she needed him most? Was not it one of the

strongest arguments against Rome,—the deserting of blood ties, of home duties for the slothful, contemplating life of isolated religion?

"But I am not going to leave you. You must come with me. You will keep house for me in Rome." Manlike he did not realise the selfishness of the request—what such uprooting meant to the quiet, homely Englishwoman.

But she had gone, followed him to Babylon, still hopeful that her influence might survive, that her daily prayers and quoting of texts might at last, at last save him from the clutches of the Evil One, for to her it seemed that to go back to idolatry from the pure teachings of the Bible could only be explained as a form of madness or a possession.

"Doog-a-doog, doog-a-doog" went the train, and the noise seemed to her like the mocking voices of the ghosts that would not be laid low, that dogged her footsteps to Rome. What had she done, she asked herself, that God should answer her prayers thus? An honest, upright, clean life, the

love of a virtuous maiden for him,—that was all she had asked God for. But to live to see her son a Roman priest!—it was like some awful nightmare. Perhaps what she had felt most was when he had appeared before her in the long black robe worn by the intending priests while they studied at the college.

How strange it was the way the two women had influenced his life—the one his mind, the other his heart—without either bringing rest or happiness to it! It could not be otherwise than that rejoicing should prevail at Rome over the conversion of the clever young Englishman. It was to Father Carlini that this master-stroke was ascribed, and he would have been less than human had he not protested but feebly against the popular belief. To Mary Fellcroft he wrote: "I ascribe the glory of his conversion to you!" And Cardinal Lozelli, at the Father's instigation, wrote her a most flattering letter, informing her of the Pope's approval, and the granting of many years' indulgences. But as time went on, the priests who had the charge

of initiating Harold into the mysterious doctrines of Rome, became aware that they had not to do with an ordinary convert. One very advanced 'Maximiser' had shaken his head and pronounced him dangerous..

"He is too argumentative," said another.

"He only takes doctrine too seriously," was Father Carlini's explanation.

While Harold himself, with British plain-speaking, had said, "I am not trying to learn the doctrines of Rome because I am persuaded that it is the right Church; I am trying to find out if it is the *only* Church, if it fulfils *all* that I require."

Often he came back discouraged, unpersuaded. What struck him most were the differences of opinion amongst the Roman clergy. He had thought that they were all one in faith, but it struck him now that identity of belief did not exist, that it was only for the benefit of the public that they affected union. Again, it struck him unfavourably that there seemed two distinct religions—one for the clergy, one for the laity. Their religion seemed as

partial as their communion. Once even hot words had passed between himself and a teacher. Harold had quoted some texts of scripture that seemed to him to circumvent the theory of infallibility; he had hoped that some convincing, compelling argument would be brought to bear on this. He had quoted the fourteenth chapter of the Acts: "We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities to serve the living God." And again, Revelations xxii. 9: "See thou do it not: I am thy fellow-servant and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God. I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not, for I am thy fellow-servant." And the priest, unable to refute, had said, impatiently, "You will never be a good Catholic till you give up the Bible."

"I am ready to," Harold retorted, "if you will give me something in its place." He could not but confess to himself that as he advanced in the knowledge of the

doctrines of Rome, the image of Christ became fainter—crowded out, as it were, by the many figures in the gigantic picture of Rome's pageant. Yet still he strove to tell himself that the details of Rome's teachings mattered not, provided the whole scheme meant a near living to Jesus Christ. Did it? That was the point. As he read the Fathers and the many-swaying ideas that had come to them, the story of their divisions, their schisms, their opposed opinions; as he read the history of the Church of Rome in 1046, when three rival Popes were deposed in favour of Clement II., the story of the great schism in 1378, and the prolonged strife that lasted till 1417, the pure, unchanging steadfastness of unswerving conviction seemed to disappear, the differences of opinion of St Catherine of Sienna and St Vincent Ferrer, the jealousies that had raged between the Franciscans and the Dominicans, the bitter dissensions between the Jesuits and other orders that had hindered the furthering of Christianity in China and Japan, seemed to him not

even second in importance to the envenomed hostility that existed in the days of Elizabeth and James I. between the Regulars and the Parochial clergy.

With his clearness of brain he was able to bring these divisions down to the present day, and compare them with the diverse expressions of opinion contained in Cardinal Manning's *Petri Privilegium* and Cardinal Newman's *Letters to the Duke of Norfolk.* Looked at closely, the theological teaching of Rome lost a good deal of its charm; yet he still strove to look to the Beyond — the Beyond that soared above every Church, above any form of faith, that reached to where faith earned its rest, where doctrines were no longer needed. He had glided smoothly and with satisfied explanations over the image-worship, over Mariolatry, over the doctrine of penances and indulgences, the use of amulets and charms, the theory of Purgatory,—even the question of the Infallibility of the Pope, provided he acted in union with the Bishops. All these were but means

to an end—silly corruptions, puerile attempts to fasten the power of the Church on to the laity; but what he could not grasp was the difference between the teaching to the priests and the teaching to the laity, the dislike the clergy had to explaining the Bible, the ignorance of the Scriptures displayed by the inferior priests, and allowed, even encouraged amongst the people—above all, the partial communion side by side with the words, "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me and I in him." And, again, the proof in St Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, which proved that the drinking of the cup was intended to continue: "Whosoever shall eat this bread or drink this cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the blood and body of the Lord." Oh, if they would only be frank to him, and tell him that the Testament was wrong—a forgery, the ignorant babblings of fishermen—how far, far better it would be; but if they would, but if they did, where, then, was man's salvation

to be found? The at once poetic, realistic, and truth-ringing tale of a Man-God, where had it come from?

Once more Vi Spicer's words returned to him: "That's a thought no parson could have put into your head. It's one of those thoughts that come to you." Yes; as he walked further and further into the marshy quagmires of doctrine, he became more and more imbued with the certainty that true religion came of a mystic whispering, that the Holy Ghost spoke to each, not to a body; yet as he progressed in the acquaintance of the doctrines of Rome, it became clearer and clearer to him, at the same time, that the Church of Rome was the only one that could cope with a troubled heart such as his. Its knowledge of the human heart frightened him; yet surely, through the Roman Church, could he best attain to the ultimate resting-place of the firm, established truth he sought for himself, which he now longed to impart to others. It could not be, he said to himself, that such vague un-

certainty had been intended. The Holy Spirit had been sent to explain, to call to man's remembrance everything the Christ had told them; surely, then, it behoved men to understand. What other tradition, what authorised account could the Church of Rome give of the coming of the Holy Ghost than that contained in the second chapter of the Acts? And what was there in that chapter to make any rational man suppose that the Holy Spirit was only bestowed upon the apostles? On the contrary, Peter, quoting the prophet Joel, says: "On My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out of My spirit, saith the Lord."

And so, day by day, as Harold read on, a dual work was accomplishing itself within him. At every turn something in the forms of the Church of Rome jarred upon him. Its organisation, its apparent intent to unite in order to resist, to submerge, to insist, began to disturb him as much as the want of organisation and unity of the Church of England had failed to assure him. Yet with it all came the con-

viction that while no Church appeared to be that of Christ, every form of real worship, every real desire to love and believe the teaching of Christ, was right; that it mattered not if one attained through Wesleyanism or Romanism or Anglicism, so that the whole fibre of one's religious being centred around the living Christ, clung to him, followed him; if one's whole idea of duty was contained in the following of the two commandments, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself."

And so two winters and two summers passed away, and the time of his ordination came and went, and he was appointed to a Roman Catholic church in England, and at every service the church overflowed to hear the wonderful preaching of Father Clement. "He is no more a Roman at heart than I am," said his mother to herself, and day after day she prayed that he might return to the simple teachings of his childhood, as she had prayed before that he might not wander from them. Mary Fellcroft was one of the first who

had gone to hear him. Had he forgiven her? she wondered. And as the days went by, and as he preached and prayed, so daily he seemed to detach himself more and more from all creeds. His sermons grew more and more like the Sermon on the Mount. He seemed to have forgotten ceremonial and dogma alike in his effort to draw souls onward to a certain God—a goal face to face with which the things of this world paled and seemed unworthy.

"What matter," he would cry from the pulpit, "if you are miserable, if you are abused, persecuted, misunderstood, if you fail, if you are abased. Push on, push on, and as you press forward, forgive." It was the same creed as he had preached to de Clary, it was the creed of the Bible, but it could not stand as the creed of Rome. Strange rumours crept within the walls of the Vatican. This man was condemning the power of Rome; he was giving to the public what was meant for the secret delectation of the clergy. And priests were sent from Rome to listen to his sermons and to report upon them.

"What matter if your creed be Anglican or Roman so that you reach Christ?" he preached one day. "What matter if you believe in the power of Saints or the power of the Blessed Virgin? What matter if penances and indulgences, purgatory and confession be preached to you? What matter if one believes in the Carmelite scapula, another in the cord of St Francis, another in the medal of St Joseph? What matter if the Pope be infallible or not? What matters anything so that it lead you to Christ?"

And as he preached, it seemed as if a wave of religious passion communicated itself to his hearers. There was a moment when it would have surprised no one, had the whole congregation risen to its feet and cried out, "We will follow you. We will leave everything we have in the world and follow you, so that you lead us to Christ." And his mother, who had come to listen, knew, while tears rolled down her face as she knelt to hear him give the blessing, that her prayers had been answered; and Mary Fellcroft knew

that she was forgiven; and Vi Spicer, sitting in a far corner listening to the music, felt that her whole life given to Christ would not suffice to wipe out the past years.

Only little Irma, who had not heard him, wondered sometimes if he ever thought of her—if he was happy. Poor little Irma, who had not been able to grow accustomed to life, and who had disappointed the Reverend Matthew! Who can disbelieve in earthly luck that sees one springing from joy to joy, others clutched at by the thorny briars of disillusion, and tried at every turn? Her father had been condemned to five years' imprisonment, and the shock of it had nearly killed her; but, perhaps, what had been hardest of all to bear, had been her husband's want of sympathy, and the unctuous way in which he would say, "No man can expect to break one of God's most important commandments and escape His wrath." And it had seemed to Irma as if she must shriek out, when morning and evening he added to the

prayers the lines: "Have mercy, oh Lord, on those who have fallen from Thy way. Render to them their sin intolerable, restore them to Thy paths of righteousness, oh God. Give them a full consciousness of their sin." Yet day by day Irma tried to force herself to live, that she might at last clasp him in her arms again, the only creature she had in the world to love.

But those who dedicate their lives to following the Son of many Sorrows are not allowed to follow along the path of life in peace, and so it was that, just as Harold was becoming engrossed in his work, and seemed to himself, through much reading and many prayers, to have attained at last the full sense of Christ's meaning, there crossed his life one of those great crashing thunderbolts that fall like felled oaks athwart our pathway and check our progress, and leave us fearful and astonished, wondering whether we shall ever remove it from our path.

Late one evening Harold was sitting in his study writing. He had been engaged

for some time on a work entitled *The True Definitions of the Church of Rome.* The paper lay strewn around, a small lamp threw a tiny circle just around the table where he was working, a pile of books stood on one side, one or two thrown open, and a well-thumbed Bible lay close to his hand. It was a summer evening, and through the half-opened window came towards him now and then one or other of the sounds that disturb the night in great cities. Now and then he leaned back in his chair, now and then his thoughts wandered to Irma. Suddenly he became conscious of footsteps close to the door, and the front door bell rang out. He went to answer the door himself. It was Father Carlini who entered, and while Harold bade him welcome, he wondered at his appearance (although he knew he was in London) at that hour. Nearer the light of the lamp he could see that the priest's face wore a worried expression, and that he looked uneasily at the closely written sheets of paper that were strewn around.

"I have come on a very difficult mission," he began, after shaking hands, "one I would rather have entrusted to anyone else, and yet which from friendship I elected to carry out myself. The fact is, I am entrusted with a mission from Rome."

Harold remained silent. It seemed to him now as if he had expected this.

"The fact is," the priest went on, "that rumours have reached Rome that your sermons are not orthodox—in fact, that your teaching is evangelical, I may add exclusively evangelical. It has never been the custom of Rome to preach from the Gospels, except within a certain prescribed limit enjoined and pointed out by the Church."

"Custom without truth is only antiquity of error": the words of St Cyprian looked up at Harold from the paper on the table. A little further he could see a text he had just copied: "Ye reject the commandments of God that ye may keep your own traditions." His rapid grasp of truth, his bold way of facing it, made him realise that

from a Roman Catholic point of view he had deserved censure. He leaned back in his chair, and looking the priest full in the face, asked, "And what are those limits?"

The priest fidgeted. He knew too well how little he himself knew of those limits, how hopelessly ignorant the Roman priest is of the Bible. He also knew that it would be useless to fence with Harold. "I see that you are just the same as ever. You have never been able to disassociate yourself from the idea that the Bible is the guide for spiritual life."

"I confess that every day I live I find it more difficult to do so," said Harold. "I will ask you again, as I asked you in Rome — What will you give me in its place?"

"Then, my dear friend, you are not a Catholic."

"Perhaps not," said Harold, getting up and pacing up and down the room with his back to him, as the full force of his many theories came back to him, a thousand arguments for and against Rome running through his brain. Then, turning towards

Father Carlini, he said: "I had hoped that you would leave me alone to carry on my own work in my own way. I have never said a word against any of the doctrines of Rome. Whatever my private ideas, I have never allowed anyone to imagine that I did not believe in the teachings of Rome."

"But you have not enforced them," said Father Carlini, with a touch of irony.

"I cannot," said Harold, simply. "Real religion seems to me to soar beyond any doctrines laid down by man, be they ever so inspired."

"Then, my dear friend, my very dear friend, it pains me to say so, but you must leave the Church of Rome." Then, as Harold looked at him surprised, startled, he went on, glancing at the papers on Harold's writing-table, "It is said, too, that you are writing a book expressing your views."

"Certainly I am, but there is nothing in it that upsets the authority of Rome."

"It will probably be put upon the index."

"I cannot believe that the Vatican

would show such signs of weakness," said Harold, with a touch of scorn.

"You know what interest I have always taken in you," went on the priest. "I have opened my heart to you in a way I have never done to anyone else. You know what I think are the weak points of Rome; but between this, and preaching as you do, there is a difference. We hear that you do not even insist on confession."

"I insist on nothing. I am too thankful if I meet a believing heart, a person who tries even to understand the mind of Christ."

"Then what *do* you teach?" asked Father Carlini. "Forgive me for being so inquisitive, but I am obeying orders."

"I teach Christ," said Harold, simply; and as he spoke, it seemed to him that the priest bowed his head and that his eyes fell. Then Harold went on: "I cannot, cannot preach anything else, it is no good asking me. I cannot follow the teaching of the present Church of Rome. Give me the Rome of St Justin, of Tertullian, of St Basil the Great, of St Augustine, of St

Chrysostom, and I will follow it. Let them leave me to follow that. It is good enough for me; it is enough for the souls of men."

"It is too late to-night," said Father Carlini, "to discuss the different phases through which the Church of Rome has passed, and which have brought her to the perfect unity she now enjoys—a perfection of unity which makes her tower above the whole world in her indisputable, invincible strength, against which nothing can or will prevail. But my orders are peremptory. I am to ask you to draw up a full report of your theories and your teachings."

CHAPTER XXI.

ALL night nearly Harold paced the room, asking himself what his religion really was, whether it was his duty to submit implicitly to the doctrines of Rome, to insist on the puerile acts and petty impositions by which the Church of Rome fastened itself on to the hearts and minds of men and women, principally the latter; and as he walked up and down in the semi-darkness, or stood for one instant at the window and turned his face towards the twinkling sky, it seemed to him that at last his faith was growing clearer. The jurisdiction of Rome, its mission, its concentration still filled him with compelling admiration. He had no doubt in his mind that the Holy Spirit had been sent to the apostles in order

that a world governing religion should be founded. It might even be that the see of St Peter was an inheritable gift, the mediation of Saints almost too insignificant a fact to be considered as a form of doctrine, could still come under the heading of the "effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availing much." The theory of penance was good for the character, the theory of indulgences he smiled at, confession depended on the temperament of the person. To some confession brought comfort and help, to others not; but what he could not shut his eyes to now, was the fact that the worship of Jesus Christ was swamped by other cults, that the whole Christian religion as a divine revelation had been whole and perfect to the Church of Rome, but that the Church of Rome had diverted the intention of Christ, which was only that an established jurisdiction should perpetuate His divine teachings, and bring to the remembrance of the generations to come the words He had spoken. What he realised was, that the Church

of Rome had taken away the Bible from him, from the whole world, and given him instead the doctrines of men.

Would it be possible, he asked himself, to open out a new faith, to return to the ancient teaching of the Church of Rome, before the new creeds of Pius IV., before the Council of Trent, before the many new-found teachings and modern fashions of creeds had pierced to the heart of the Church? Once more, wearily, yet with deep earnestness, he turned over the leaves of his Bible; and as if an answer—swift, unerring, complete—had been sent him, the text stared him in the face: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me."

He had loitered too long, he must go to work in the great vineyards of the Lord that had no vinedressers, in the folds that had no shepherds. The world was wide, chiliads were the souls that were asking, many the aching wounds that wanted binding. He must go his way, sell whatsoever he had and give

it to the poor, and take up his cross and follow. The morning dawn found him asleep in his chair, but on the weary, ascetic face lay a smile of peace that had not been there before—the reflection of a thought that no parson had put there.

But the morning brought with it, too, a trial that was as the last test of the man's strength, the final shriek of this world's turmoil before he gave it up for ever, the last whisper of the Evil One as he acknowledged to himself that this soul had escaped him.

The postman brought a letter from de Clary saying that Irma was dead! It was thought that the joy of her father's release had been too much for her, the shock of seeing him again too great. But Harold could read between the lines, that the loving heart, starved of love, had died of too great a feast of it, when she had been reunited to her father. "This is my reward for confessing my guilt, for undergoing my punishment cheerfully and every hardship without a murmur, kept up by

the one hope that soon I should have my little one again," wrote de Clary, and for one instant the revolt and bitterness of his heart found an echo in Harold's. Yes, it was hard, hard at these moments to believe in the justice and mercy of God, unless one could look beyond to the great end of things.

It was difficult for Harold's mother to believe it, when one evening Harold caught her in his arms and bade her farewell, and left the door of the house to go forth on foot and preach to the nations the doctrines of Christ. Long he had debated with himself whether it was his duty to leave his mother, and the silent, resigned figure of the Mother of Sorrows rose up before him. His divine Master had had to leave His mother for the great work he had to do. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." As she had sown, so she had reaped. She had offered her son to God, and He had accepted him. The ghosts stood around—gaunt, mocking, triumphant—as she watched with

dimmed, streaming eyes her only son leave his door without purse or scrip, clothed only in the long black soutane that belonged to the Church of Rome, but with a small Bible thrust into his bosom. "Your prayers are answered," the ghosts seemed to say, "your prayers are answered, what have you to complain of?" But it seemed to her now that there was nothing left her but to die.

Years had come and gone, and the great preacher stood on the hillside outside a country town, and preached once more the theme he was never tired of—the mercy and justice and love of Christ to sinners. A sea of upturned faces surrounded him, a breathless silence had taken possession of the crowd. Only one woman who heard noticed how pale and drawn the face was, how ill and worn he looked. "Children, children!" he cried to them, "however dark the world appear, however hard your lives, however weary and sad and poor and discouraged you are, there is a God, there is a Christ,

there is an end. Be ye faithful unto death, and I——" The last word was almost unintelligible. He stopped an instant, then he swayed backwards and fell forward. A hundred hands were stretched to catch him; he had fainted, they said. Some rushed for water, others for a doctor, but one woman in the crowd knew, as if she had been told, that he was dying. As they laid him on the grass, she raised his head on her knees that the hard pebbles should not hurt it. Once he opened his eyes, and meeting Vi Spicer's, smiled. "Faithful——" he murmured; and as she bent down closer, she heard the words, "Not a thought that the par——" Then, with the words, "Revelation!" "Jesus!" he died—died with his head on the knees of the woman who had erred. The sinner and the saint close to each other beneath God's sky! "Mercy and truth had met together: righteousness and peace had kissed each other." And the earthly life of the Real Christian was over.

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